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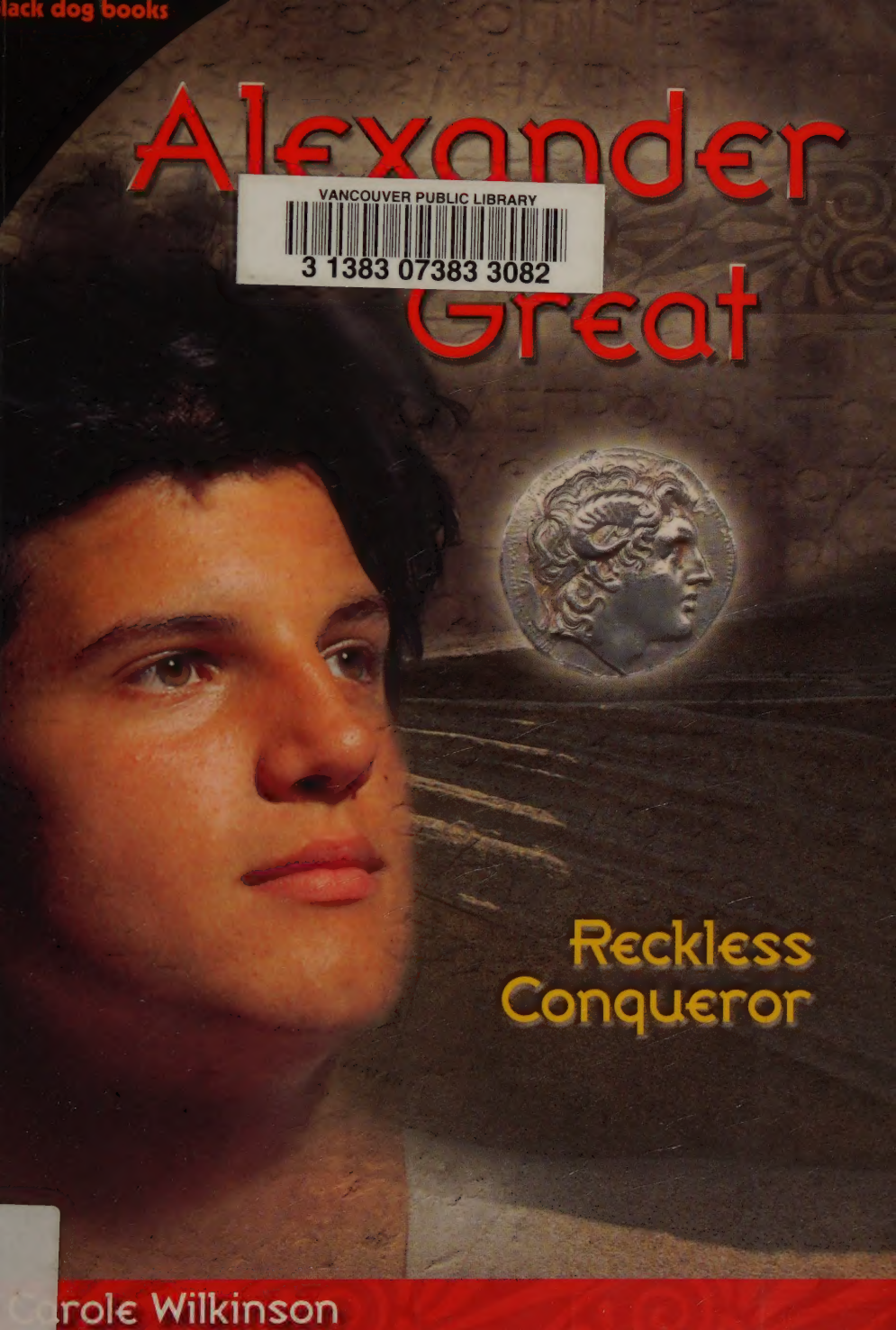

Reckless Conqueror

role Wilkinson

CHILDREN'S

Alexander the Great

Reckless Conqueror

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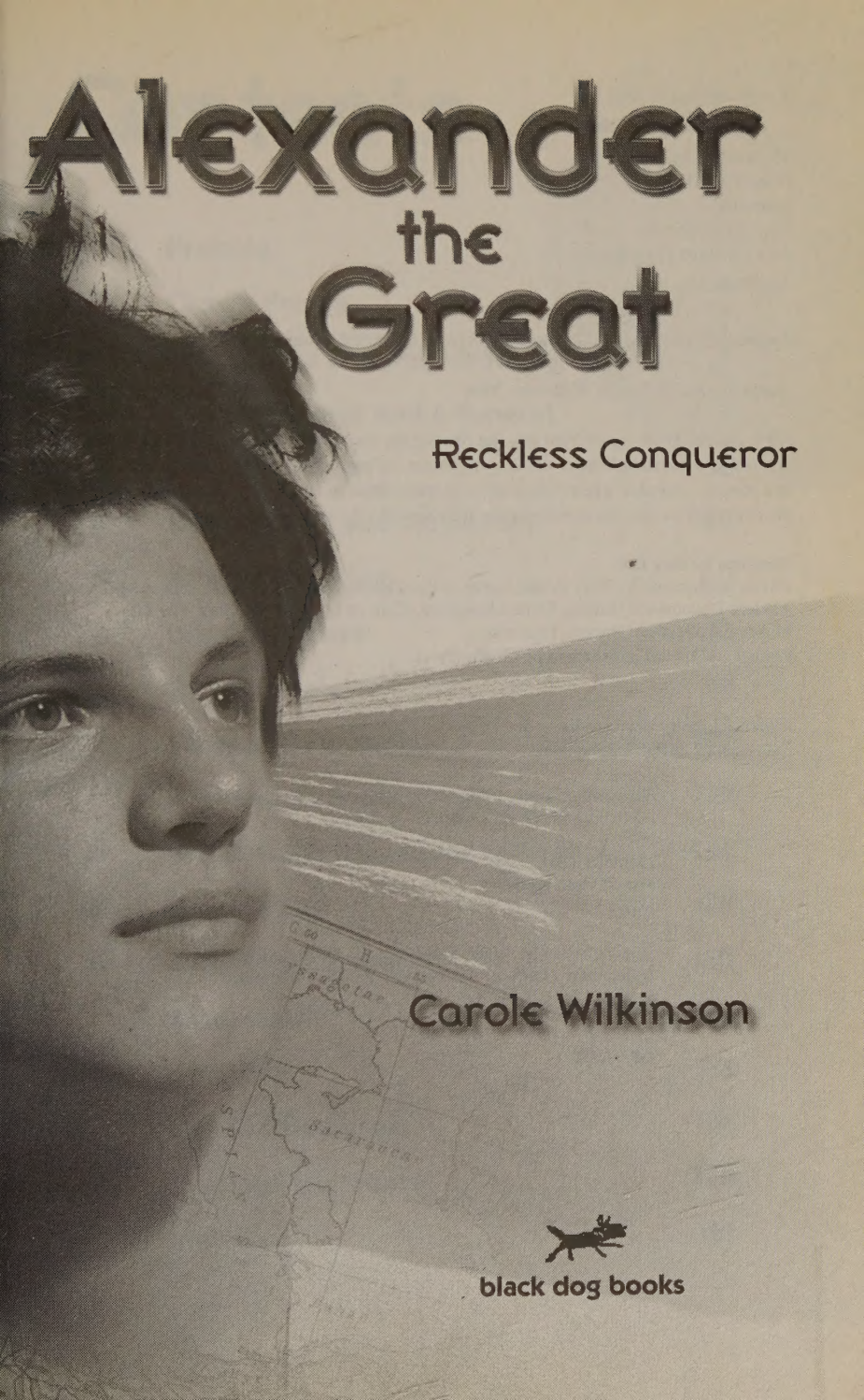
Alexander the Great

Reckless Conqueror



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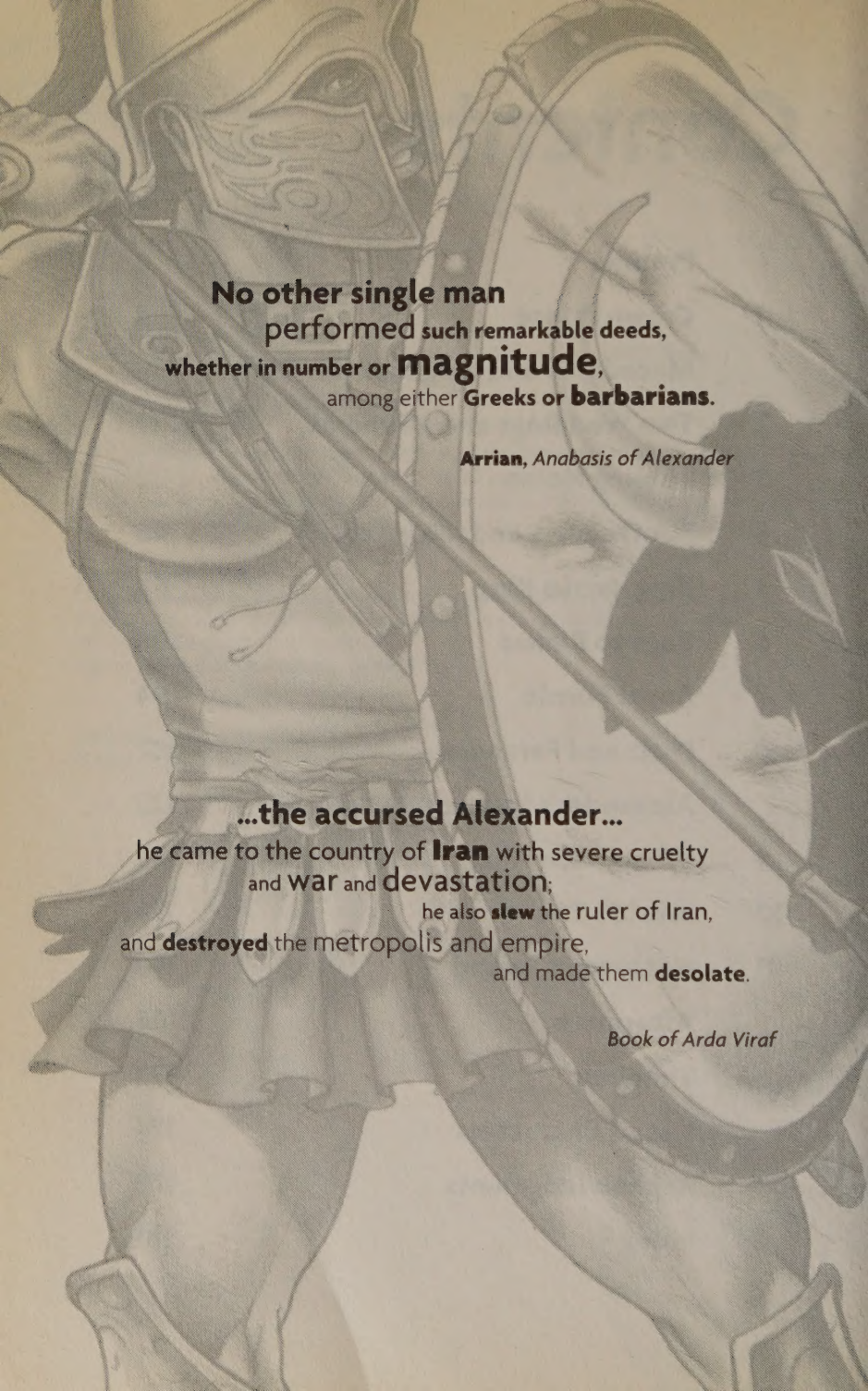


No other single man
performed **such remarkable deeds,**
whether in number or magnitude,
among either **Greeks or barbarians.**

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*

...the accursed Alexander...
he came to the country of **Iran** with severe cruelty
and war and devastation;
he also **slew** the ruler of Iran,
and **destroyed** the metropolis and empire,
and made them **desolate.**

Book of Arda Viraf

Prelude

A man wearing a striped tunic and a purple-edged cloak is standing on a river bank. He doesn't seem aware of the rain, which soaks his cloak and his tunic. The fact that his legs are splattered with mud and his sandalled feet are sinking into squelchy earth doesn't seem to bother him. He's a short man. His hair hangs in dripping curls. He is gazing across the river. He has travelled to the four corners of the world: the River Danube in Europe to the north-west, the Nile in Egypt to the south-west, the wild lands of Sogdiana in the north-east and the River Indus in India to the south-east. He has gained control of the Greeks and all the tribes to the banks of the Danube. The Egyptians have named him Pharaoh of their land. A city bearing his name is being built in Sogdiana. Now he is standing three rivers beyond the Indus. But that isn't enough. He wants to continue. He wants to see the Ocean. He wants to conquer the world—every inch of it.

Picture of a Hero

If you could look back over 2000 years and see Alexander of

Macedonia standing on this river bank in northern India in the year 326 BCE, you might not think he looked like a man who could conquer the world. From statues and coins and descriptions in ancient histories, we have some idea of what Alexander looked like.

He wasn't tall. When he sat on the Persian king's throne after he'd captured the city of Susa, his men had to bring him a table to put his feet on because his feet couldn't reach the king's footstool. But what Alexander lacked in height, he made up for in strength and endurance.

In ancient times it was the custom for men to wear beards. Alexander was always clean-shaven. He ordered his soldiers to shave as well. Some say he did it so that their enemies couldn't grab their beards during battle. Others say it was because Alexander couldn't grow a beard. Whatever the reason, he started a new trend that stayed in fashion for the next 500 years.

He had a strong, muscular body. His hair was curly, reminding some people of a lion's mane. His head was permanently tilted to the left. His forehead bulged over his straight nose. He had very unusual eyes. One was grey and one was brown. They were covered with a moist film, which made them shine and gave him a dreamy look.

A Marathon Journey

Alexander had travelled all the way from Macedonia, mostly on foot, to the River Beas in India—27 000 kilometres (17 000 miles)—to stand on that muddy river bank. He'd been away from home for eight years. He'd fought in four

major battles as well as dozens of raids and skirmishes. He'd been wounded 22 times. His men, all tough soldiers, were exhausted. They'd had enough of Alexander's campaign to conquer the world. They wanted to go home. But Alexander hadn't had enough. He wanted to keep going.

What sort of a boy grows up to be a world conqueror? What urges drove Alexander to achieve such feats? What exactly was it that made Alexander so Great?

Chapter 1

Crown Prince

Royal Stables, Pella, Macedonia, 347 BCE

I was hiding behind a statue of Apollo. My friends Erigyius and Harpalus were still on the other side of the courtyard, cowering in a grove of olive trees. I signalled them to follow me, but they'd lost their nerve. We were supposed to be learning about the Trojan War. I already knew that part of history by heart, so when our tutor nodded off in the afternoon sun, I suggested we creep away and go for a swim in the lake.

"If your father catches us we'll be in trouble, Alexander," Erigyius said.

"Last time the King discovered we'd played truant, he made us march 300 stades barefoot in the blistering sun," Harpalus added.

They were too timid. They wouldn't follow me. The sound of

shouting came from the stables. It reminded me that a horse breeder had arrived from Thessaly that morning. I'd asked my father if I could go with him to view the horses, but he'd told me that my lessons were more important. I forgot about the swim and went over to the stables, taking care that no one saw me.

There were about a dozen horses. All fine looking animals. Most of them were quietly grazing, ignored, as the horse breeder, my father and six or seven of the royal grooms stood around one particular horse.

He was the most beautiful creature I have ever seen, jet black except for a white mark on his forehead. Not a big horse, but sturdy and strong.

One of the grooms tried to mount him as I watched. The horse reared up. One of its hooves struck him. The groom fell to the ground holding his bleeding head. I noticed that the other grooms were all standing at a safe distance nursing cuts and bruises. None of them had been able to mount the beast.

I edged closer, crouching behind a pile of hay. The marking on the horse's head was shaped something like an ox head.

Two of my father's cavalry officers sauntered over. The first—a big man with muscles as hard as marble—pushed the grooms aside.

"Let a real man show you how it's done," the officer said.

The horse breeder was wearing one of those straw sunhats that Thessalians are fond of. He was standing behind my father, anxiously winding the corner of his cloak around his fingers.

The officer grabbed the horse's mane with one hand and leapt on its back. The horse reared. The soldier managed to hang on for a few seconds, but then found himself lying in the dust. The horse shook his head. His mane shimmered like silk in sunlight.

"Why did you bring such a surly beast, Master Horseman?" my father snapped. "What did you say you wanted for him? Thirteen talents?"

"I'm sorry, Your Highness," the horse breeder said, bowing so low his hat fell off. "I made a mistake. The horse is too wild. Please accept my apologies. I'll take the beast away and flog him until he learns some respect."

"No!" Everyone turned in my direction. It was my voice that had called out, but I was as surprised as anyone to hear it.

I came out of my hiding place and went over to the horse. "I'll tame him."

My father scowled at me. "Why aren't you at your lessons?"

"It would be a shame to send such a fine horse away," I said, ignoring his question. "Please let me try, Father."

"You think you can do a better job than the royal grooms? Than my cavalry officers?"

"I'll wager 13 talents I can," I replied. I didn't have 13 talents, but I knew I could calm the horse.

"The horse is dangerous, Your Highness," the horsebreeder said. "Prince Alexander could be killed!"

My father held up his hand. "Let him try. If he's shirking his history lesson, at least he'll get a lesson in the dangers of overconfidence."

I moved slowly towards the horse. I barely came up to his shoulder. The grooms and the officers were all smirking. I stroked the horse's smooth flank, talking to him in a low voice. I gently took his bridle and slowly turned him so that he was facing into the sun.

It was obvious to me that the horse was frightened by shadows—his own and that of whoever was trying to mount him. Facing into the sun, he couldn't see any shadows and was a little sun-blind as well. I continued to pat him and talk to him. He calmed down. I didn't rush. I whispered into the horse's ear and stroked his noble head. I already knew what I would call him.

"I'm going to get up on you now, Bucephalas," I said, not that the horse understood a word of Macedonian, but I knew he would understand that I didn't mean him any harm.

I took hold of his mane and sprang onto his back as lightly as I could. He skittered a little, but I softly reassured him. I had never felt so comfortable on a horse. It was like sitting in a chair carved exactly for my size and shape.

I touched his flanks with my heels and he cantered off. I let him go wherever he wanted at first, then I gently tugged the bridle and he went where I wanted him to go. The royal grooms applauded as we rode around the field. So did the horse breeder, who was no doubt relieved he wouldn't get a beating for bringing my father an unmanageable horse. The cavalry officers stood sternly with their arms folded.

"Your tutor should be waking from his afternoon nap," Father smiled at me. "You had better go back to your lessons."

I knew the horse was mine.

Alexander's father bought the horse for his son, paying 13 talents for it. This was a huge sum of money, enough for an ordinary Macedonian to live on all their life. Alexander named the horse Bucephalas, which is Greek for "ox head". He rode Bucephalas in all of his campaigns until the horse died at the ripe old age of 30.

In Alexander's day, just one talent was a lot of money. It still is. A talent of gold weighed about 26 kilograms (57 pounds). The value of that much gold today is about half a million US dollars.

Precocious

Another story recounts how Alexander, when he was even younger, welcomed some Persian ambassadors to the palace. His father was away on a campaign. The ambassadors were surprised to find such a youngster greeting them. They were even more surprised when he announced he wanted to ask them some questions about their homeland. They expected that the young prince would ask them about the wonders of Persia—the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the magnificent palaces, the fabulous wealth. These weren't the sorts of things that interested seven-year-old Alexander. He wanted to know about the condition of the Persian Royal Road. He wanted to know how many men were in the Persian army and what sort of weapons they used.

A stade is an ancient Greek measurement of distance. It was the standard length of a furrow in a field—approximately 160 metres (525 feet).

It seems that the young Alexander was no ordinary boy.

Family Life

Alexander was born in 356 BCE. His father was King Philip II of Macedonia. His mother, Olympias, was a princess from the neighbouring country of Epirus.

Alexander lived the privileged life of a prince. His home was the royal palace in Pella, the capital city of Macedonia. His father was a battle-scarred military man who was more often than not away fighting campaigns. Alexander loved

his mother, but she belonged to a strange religious cult. She worshipped the god Dionysus, who was the Greek god of wine and vegetation. Followers of Dionysus were mainly women who took part in secret ceremonies that some said involved killing animals with their bare hands and eating the flesh raw. People believed that these women had magical powers, including the ability to tame snakes. Olympias kept snakes as pets. This prompted lots of gossip around the palace. It was rumoured that she slept with them in her bed.

Alexander was the king's eldest son. Philip's only other son was intellectually disabled, so Alexander was the only heir to the throne. But the path to the throne of Macedonia was never easy. More often than not it involved murder and conspiracy, mistrust and betrayal.

Alexander's grandmother had tried to kill her husband, King Amyntas, and his brother so that she and her lover could rule Macedonia. She only succeeded in killing the brother. When King Amyntas eventually died, all three of his sons took a turn as king. One son was assassinated and one died in battle, leaving only Philip to take the throne. Even then there were several other contenders who thought they deserved to be the king more than Philip. As Philip's only heir, Alexander's passage to the throne should have been easy.

Alexander's World

When Alexander was born, the world was a very different place to the one we know today. People at that time didn't know that Britain, China, Russia, America, most of Africa and Australia existed. They thought the world consisted of one big landmass made up of Europe, north Africa and part of Asia. Like everyone else, Alexander believed that this land was surrounded on all sides by a vast ocean.

Greece was the most powerful and cultured place in Europe at that time. But Greece wasn't really a nation then. It was a collection of independent city-states, each with its own government, laws and army. There were more than a thousand city-states, though some of them were hardly big enough to be called cities.

Athens, Sparta and Thebes were three of the biggest and most powerful Greek city-states. They each had a similar culture—they spoke the same language, their governments were elected, they worshipped the same gods and they had similar education systems. Sometimes they banded together to fight a common enemy. Sometimes they fought each other.

Macedonia was a small but beautiful country of forest-covered mountains and fertile plains where crops grew well. There were deposits of gold and silver to be mined from the hillsides. The Greeks, however, thought that Macedonia was a pretty insignificant place. They considered the Macedonians to be a rabble of uncultured, bickering

tribes, inferior to the Greeks. The Macedonians spoke their own language instead of Greek, they were warlike and they weren't educated in the classical Greek style. Nowadays we would call the Greeks' attitude to Macedonians racial discrimination.

During his reign, Alexander's father changed Macedonia. He built up a large, well-trained army and united the hill tribes and independent territories. He made Macedonia a strong military power that the Greeks were forced to take notice of.

A Famous Teacher

There were no schools in Macedonia back then, but Alexander's father decided that his heir should have a good Greek-style education. He appointed tutors to teach his son. From them, Alexander learned how to argue a point using careful debate. He studied geometry and astronomy. He discussed poetry with his tutor and memorised long poems by Homer. He learned military skills—swordplay, archery and javelin throwing. He also learned how to play the lute.

Modern doctors have suggested that the reason for the permanent tilt of Alexander's head and his different coloured eyes might have been a condition called "ocular torticollis". This is when certain nerves from the brain to the eye are paralysed.

When Alexander turned 13 his father appointed a new tutor for his son. The tutor's name was Aristotle. He was a famous Greek philosopher whose writings are still studied today. Philip sent Alexander and his new teacher to a village called Mieza with a few other highborn boys to keep him company. This

beautiful area was on the slopes of a mountain planted with vineyards and shady orchards. It was known as the Precinct of the Nymphs. Some of these boys, such as Hephaestion, Harpalus and Nearchus became important members of Alexander's army when they grew up.

Aristotle is considered to be a great scholar and thinker, but some of his views don't fit with the way we think today. Like all Greek people, he referred to anyone who wasn't Greek as a barbarian. Aristotle believed that non-Greeks were inferior people suited only to being slaves. Since Macedonia had become a powerful country, Aristotle, like most Greeks, didn't refer to Macedonians as barbarians (not to their faces anyway). His advice to the young Alexander was to treat barbarians the same way as he would treat animals and plants. It was advice that Alexander later ignored.

Aristotle was a strong supporter of democracy, though his idea of democracy was different to ours. In ancient Greece, only men of good birth could vote to decide who led the government. Slaves, women and foreigners were not allowed to vote. This was something that Aristotle thoroughly approved of. He was also a republican. He thought a country's leader should be chosen because of his knowledge and skills, not just because he happened to be the king's son. It is strange then that this anti-monarchist was chosen to be the future king's teacher. Aristotle adapted his views so that he could continue teaching his most famous student, saying that it was okay for a king to rule as long as he was an exceptional person.

Deputy Leader

After three years studying with Aristotle, Philip decided that Alexander had had enough education and it was time for him to start his training as Macedonia's next king. Philip sent word that his son was to return to Pella. Philip was, as usual, away fighting a war, so he appointed his son as Regent of Macedonia. Alexander was only 16 years old, but his father trusted him with the responsible job of being deputy leader of the country.

Alexander gave Lysippos the sole authorisation for producing all his portrait statues, because he alone expressed in bronze Alexander's character... others, who sought to imitate the characteristic turning of his head and the liquid, melting softness and brightness of his eyes, were unable to preserve the manliness and lion-like ferocity of his countenance.

Plutarch, *Alexander*

While Alexander was regent, one of the warlike tribes that Philip had brought under control rebelled. Young Alexander organised an expedition to subdue them. He led the army himself. When the rebels were defeated, he renamed their city Alexandropolis. This was the first of many places that he was to name after himself. From an early age Alexander wanted to leave his mark on the world.

Philip must have been impressed with his son's capabilities as a general. When the Greek city-states banded together against him, Philip sent for his son and gave him command of 2000 cavalry—soldiers who rode on horseback—in the Battle of Chaeronea. Alexander led an attack on the Sacred

Band—the very best soldiers from the city of Thebes, and defeated them.

Alexander was then appointed to travel to Athens with one of his father's generals to negotiate a peace treaty. To make sure that the Athenians understood who had the upper hand in the negotiations, they carried with them the ashes of the 1000 Athenian soldiers who had died in the battle.

Ambitious

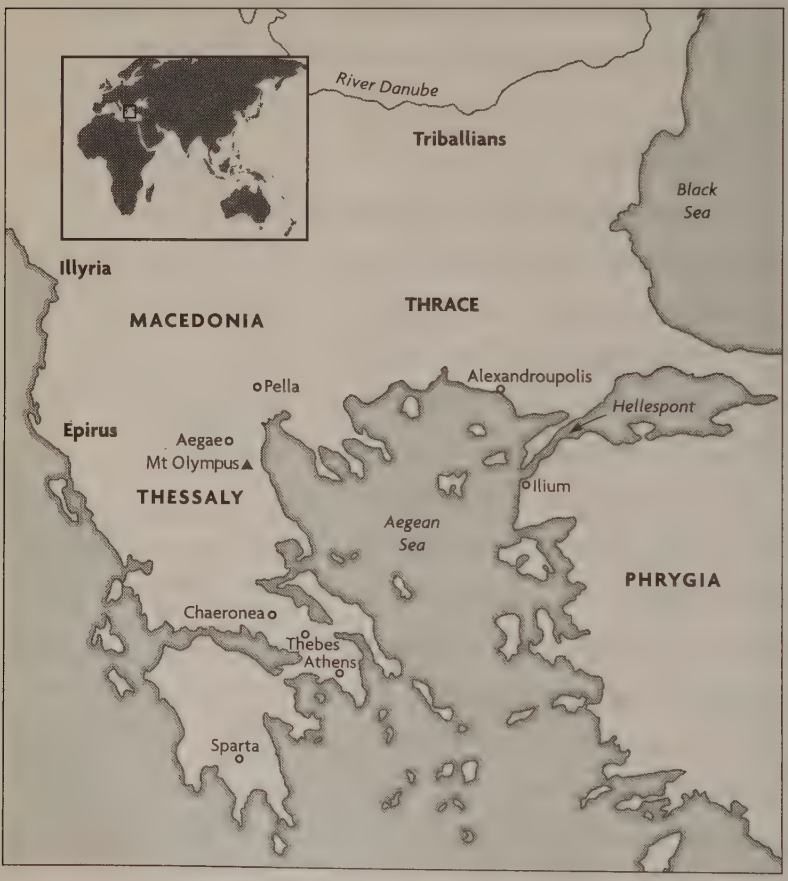
Before long, Philip had all the Greek city-states under control and he forced them to join an alliance with Macedonia, which was known as the League of Corinth. He made sure that he was appointed the leader of the league. In just four years, Philip had turned Macedonia from a backward nation racked by internal squabbling into a superpower.

Philip's next goal was to conquer Persia. One hundred and fifty years earlier, there had been another war involving Greeks and Persians. The Persian King Xerxes had crossed into Europe with his army. He had subdued Macedonia and burned Athens. It had been a humiliating defeat. As leader of the League of Corinth, Philip decided that it was his job to take revenge.

Persia is the old name for the country that is called Iran today. In Alexander's time Persia had conquered many of its neighbours, including Babylonia and Egypt and other countries with less familiar names such as Bactria and Sogdiana. It was the biggest empire the world had ever known.

Young Alexander admired his father's great feats, and he

wanted to be a great king and general himself. But he was worried that his father was so successful that there wouldn't be any great deeds left for him to do when he became king. Alexander needn't have worried.



Macedonia and neighbouring lands

Chapter 2

Two Weddings and a Funeral

Royal Palace, Pella, Macedonia 337 BCE

I normally enjoy a banquet as much as the next man. But I wasn't enjoying this one. Not at all. I watched my father eating, drinking and laughing with his new bride. She was wearing a crown made especially for the occasion—a delicate wreath of olive leaves made of beaten gold, with a many-petalled golden flower at the front. She looked very pleased with herself. My father didn't look in my direction once, but I caught her adjusting her crown and stealing a triumphant glance at me on more than one occasion.

There were all sorts of delicacies spread before me—roasted birds, pig's belly, fish brought from the Black Sea. The other guests

were eating their fill and exclaiming over a delicious dish that combined the flavours of cumin and vinegar. The sumptuous food would have tasted bitter and sour to me, so I ate nothing. Servants kept coming round with wine jars to top up my cup, only to find it still full.

All I could think of was my poor mother, sitting alone in her quarters, abandoned and humiliated by my father. I looked at him, swilling back wine with no regard for his dignity and staring dewy-eyed at his latest wife. There's no fool like an old fool, they say.

The ceremony was mercifully short. Vows were exchanged and prayers offered to the gods for a long marriage. That wasn't what I was praying for though. Just the opposite.

A famous actor had been brought from Athens to entertain the guests. At any other time I would have enjoyed the performance, but today I couldn't concentrate on the play. I turned my silver wine cup around and around. My thoughts were elsewhere.

A man to my right tried to engage me in conversation. He rambled on and on about how amazing it was that someone as young as me had been so victorious at the Battle of Chaeronea. He meant it to be flattery, I think. I stopped his chatter with a stare.

I was relieved when the bride's uncle, Attalas, got to his feet to propose a toast. As soon as the speeches were over, I would make a quiet exit and go to console my mother.

"Macedonians," said Attalas, which was rude as there were many guests from Greece and even some from barbarian lands. "Let us ask the gods to bless the happy couple with a fruitful marriage."

The guests raised their cups and murmured their approval. All except for me.

"In particular may they be blessed with a son," Attalas continued and he looked me in the eye as he raised his cup. "Then King Philip will have a true heir."

I don't know what reaction this comment got from the guests, because I hurled my wine cup at Attalas. It hit him right between the eyes. He fell back onto his couch and looked rather stupidly at the mixture of blood and wine that was dripping off his nose.

"Are you saying that my birth is in question, Attalas?" I shouted getting to my feet.

It was obvious what he was implying. He was saying that I was not Philip's legitimate heir. I'd heard all the palace rumours, even though my friends tried to shield me from them.

I turned to walk away from this sordid ceremony, when my father, much the worse for drink, staggered to his feet, fumbling to draw his sword. Fool that I am, I thought that he was getting up to defend me and my mother's honour. But to my surprise, when he finally got his sword out of its scabbard, he lunged in my direction.

"How dare you ..." he began, but he tripped over a footstool and fell full length. His sword sliced through a cushion.

I laughed out loud at this sight. "Careful, old man," I said. "You're likely to do yourself an injury."

He struggled to get to his feet but failed.

"So this is the man telling everybody he is going to cross to Asia and conquer Persia, is it?" I said. "He can't even manage to cross the room!"

The king's bodyguards hesitated. They didn't know what to do. They decided against arresting me and instead they helped their struggling lord to his feet. Interestingly, the bride left her husband to the guards and went to aid her uncle.

"Don't worry," I said in the general direction of the bodyguards. "I'm going. I don't want to spend another minute in this suffocating hall."

The dispute had brought back my appetite. I turned back to the table and helped myself to some meat. It was indeed particularly tasty. I took some bread and then strode out of the room chewing on a piece of fowl. Even though I knew my life had changed forever, I felt strangely calm.

There had been no question that Alexander would be the next king of Macedonia ... until Philip decided to take another wife.

In Macedonia it was accepted that a king could have more than one wife. It was normal practice for monarchs to marry princesses from foreign countries for political reasons. It was a necessary way of keeping the peace. No army was going to attack Macedonia if one of their princesses was living in the palace at Pella. Philip had done it before, several times, and no one, not even Olympias or Alexander, had minded. It was understood that these were political marriages, but that Olympias was always his true wife, the woman he loved.

Alexander was very unhappy about his father's latest marriage. His mother, Olympias, was even less happy.

Trouble in Pella

Philip's new wife wasn't a foreigner. She was a Macedonian. Her name was Cleopatra and she was the niece of Attalas, one of Philip's generals. It was clear that Philip had married Cleopatra because he loved her. She was going to take the place of Olympias as the king's consort.

Attalas's wedding speech infuriated Alexander. Either Attalas was suggesting that Olympias had slept with another man and Philip wasn't Alexander's father, or he was implying that because Alexander's mother was a foreigner, then Alexander was also a foreigner. Either way he was saying that Alexander had no right to the throne of Macedonia. Instead of defending his son, Philip attacked him.

Alexander and Olympias left Pella after this incident, both unsure of their future. Olympias went back to her homeland. Alexander went to the neighbouring country of Illyria. Philip sent all of Alexander's friends into exile.

Cleopatra was soon pregnant. If the baby had been a boy Alexander would have had a rival for the throne, but it was a girl. By this time Philip had had time to reconsider his hasty actions. He wasn't getting any younger. If he died without a male heir, people would be arguing about who should be the next king. Macedonia would be weak again. The powerful nation that he had built up could easily disintegrate.

Philip sent for his son. Alexander returned to Pella, but the relationship between father and son was never the same.

Another Wedding

Alexander's sister (whose name was Cleopatra as well) was also getting married. Philip had arranged for his young daughter to marry her uncle, Olympias's brother. This was the king's way of keeping his in-laws happy and making sure that they didn't seek revenge for the way he had treated Olympias.

It was a lavish royal wedding with dignitaries from all the Greek city-states attending. Philip may have thought a family celebration was a good opportunity for him and his son to reconcile and a chance for Alexander to think about what he stood to inherit. That wasn't the way it turned out.

The day after the wedding ceremony, celebrations were to continue with athletic games. Philip arrived at the arena bright and early. To show everyone that his family was at peace, he walked in with his son on one side and his new son-in-law on the other. Suddenly one of the royal bodyguards dashed forward and stabbed Philip between the ribs with a dagger. Stunned wedding guests watched in horror as the king collapsed in a pool of blood. The king was dead.

A New King

With all the Greek officials conveniently gathered together for the wedding, Alexander had the perfect opportunity to claim the crown in front of important witnesses and to get

them to pledge their support for him. Alexander was now king of Macedonia. If anyone had any objections, they kept it to themselves.

The murderer was captured and killed. It seemed this man, whose job was to defend the king with his life, had a personal grudge against Philip. Even so, rumours spread that Alexander and his mother might have been behind the plot to kill Philip.

In 1977, archaeologists found an ancient tomb in Macedonia. It contained the bones of a man and a gold crown. The skull showed damage to the right eye. Archaeologists believe it is the tomb of King Philip, because he was blind in the right eye from an arrow wound.

The new king was young to take over the government of his country. The first few weeks of his rule were very dangerous. Alexander suddenly had a lot of enemies. As always in Macedonia, there were others vying for the throne. Alexander's cousin Amyntas was a contender. Alexander's uncle (the man who had just married his sister) was also someone Alexander had to keep an eye on. What's more, Philip's widow was pregnant again.

Bribes and Revenge

To make sure the Macedonian people accepted him as their new king, Alexander used a tactic still used by politicians today to make themselves popular—he made changes to the taxes people had to pay. In fact he abolished taxes altogether. He also brought back the friends who Philip had sent into

exile and gave them jobs in his government so that he would be surrounded by people who supported him.

Alexander soon proved that he could be just as ruthless as his ancestors when it came to protecting his position as king. He had his cousin Amyntas assassinated. He also had all of Cleopatra's male relatives killed, including Attalas, the general who had insulted him at his father's wedding. He let Philip's new wife and her daughter, Europa, continue to live at Pella.

... among barbarians the female and the slave have the same rank; and the cause of this is that barbarians have no class of natural rulers... Hence the saying of the poets—'Tis meet that Greeks should rule barbarians—implying that barbarian and slave are the same in nature.

Aristotle, *Politics*

Alexander didn't only have problems at home. The Greek city-states expected that Macedonia would be weak without Philip to lead them. They decided to take advantage of this unstable time and rise up against Macedonia. The tribes to the north also decided it was a good opportunity to regain their independence.

No doubt all his enemies thought that 20-year-old Alexander would be easy to get out of the way. They were wrong.

Surprise Attacks

Alexander marched out of Pella at the head of the Macedonian army, ready to subdue the rebel Greeks. In

Thessaly, just south of Macedonia, Alexander met his first opposition. He found the narrow mountain road blocked by Thessalian troops. Instead of fighting his way through and losing many of his men in the process, Alexander had a more ingenious plan, the first of many. He got his men to cut steps into a nearby mountain so that he and his army could take a different route and sneak up behind the enemy forces. The startled Thessalians promptly surrendered.

Alexander marched at break-neck speed through the Greek city-states. One by one they submitted to him—even powerful Thebes and Athens. Alexander was hailed as his father's successor, both as king of Macedonia and as leader of the League of Corinth.

Alexander's short Greek campaign had gained him control of Greece. It had also provided excellent training for his army. He was no longer the young king, wet behind the ears, but a successful general who fought alongside his men. He was not afraid of danger. The Macedonian soldiers were very impressed by their young king and ready to follow him wherever he wanted to go.

Foiled Plan

With the Greeks subdued in a couple of months, Alexander turned his attention to the northern tribes. These warriors also underestimated the young king. One tribe, the Triballians, confidently defended a narrow mountain pass.

They blocked the way by lining up wagons at the top of a steep slope. Alexander guessed that if he marched up the hill to attack, the Triballians would send the wagons hurtling down the hill. He instructed his men to march forward, but to leave space for the wagons to pass through. If they couldn't get out of the way of the careering wagons, he told them to lie down and cover themselves with their shields so that the wagons would ride harmlessly over them. The plan worked perfectly. After the wagons had gone crashing uselessly down the mountain, Alexander's soldiers got to their feet and advanced up the hill. The Triballians turned and fled.

Alexander marched on and defeated tribe after tribe. He didn't stop until he reached the River Danube. He had pushed the borders of Macedonia further than his father had.

A Glimpse of Things to Come

The northern tribes had learned their lesson, but Thebes hadn't. Once again they rebelled against Alexander, but they were taken by surprise. Alexander reached Thebes so quickly that the Theban leaders refused to believe it was him. Even when they realised their mistake, they still thought they could fight him off. They couldn't. As punishment for their rebellion the entire male population of Thebes was slaughtered. The women and children were sold as slaves.

The entire city was burned to the ground.

In the first few months of his reign Alexander, having only just turned 21, had given the world a taste of what was to come. He had shown that he had a great military mind. He could come up with ingenious plans to get around almost any obstacle. If anyone tried to resist him, he showed no mercy.

Another New King

In the same year that Alexander became king, another royal murder 2000 kilometres (1240 miles) away had brought about the crowning of another king. Darius III was crowned Great King of Persia. Darius should have learned some important lessons from Alexander's conquests in Greece, but his advisers chose to flatter their new king and tell him that Alexander would be no match for the Persian army. Now it was the Persians' turn to underestimate Alexander.

Chapter 3

Leaving Home

Royal Palace, Pella, Macedonia 335 BCE

There was a strange atmosphere when I arrived back at the palace. Nothing I could put my finger on, but I was sure something had changed while I'd been away. Palace attendants greeted me and congratulated me on my successes, but behind their eyes there was something unspoken, as if I'd done something wrong, something unforgivable. Some of the female servants' eyes were red-rimmed, as if they had been crying.

Nothing could spoil my good mood though. I was glad to be home. The campaign had gone well. In fact, I couldn't have wished it to be better. I had brought all the rebellions under control and pushed the northern border of Macedonia all the way to the Danube.

I was planning to bathe and eat before I went to see my mother, but I changed my mind and went straight to her chambers.

She was planning some sort of entertainment for her friends, those rather strange women who share her beliefs and worship Dionysus. She was as pleased to see me as I was her.

"Come and sit by me, Alexander," she said and patted the couch next to her. She dismissed her women and they seemed unusually keen to leave. "Tell me about your campaign."

"Thebes will not rise against me again. I can guarantee it," I told her, nibbling on some dried fruit that was in a bowl on a low table. "It was good training for me and for my men as well. A few months ago they didn't think I was old enough or experienced enough to lead them. They were sure I would fail. We had our setbacks, but in most things we prevailed. I showed them that there is nothing I would ask them to do that I wouldn't do myself. I think they respect that."

I could tell she was barely listening. Her thoughts were somewhere else.

Though she is no longer young, my mother is still a beautiful woman. Her hair hangs in dark ringlets and is held in place by a thin gold circlet. She wears a simple white chiton, like other women, but on her it is an elegant garment. As she sits, the material falls in folds at her feet as if it has been arranged by an artist. She has a mystery about her, which isn't entirely accidental.

There is one piece of jewellery that she wears constantly. It is a beautiful bracelet made of gold. In the centre is a large dark-red

garnet about the size of an almond. The tails of two golden snakes are knotted around this gem. The snakes coil out from the stone and twist round and round her arm—one spiralling towards her elbow, the other towards her wrist. After a final S-shaped twist, each snake's head is poised as if ready to strike. It is a most attractive thing, but a little sinister.

"Has something happened at Pella while I've been away, Mother?"

She smoothed out her chiton.

"There is something that you should know, Alexander," she said.

A sudden chill in the room made me shiver.

"I have rid you of that woman and her brats."

I knew that she meant Cleopatra, my father's last wife. My mother had wanted me to exile her, but she is harmless enough now that my father is dead. Her new babe was a boy, and I knew he might become a rival, but there was time enough to worry about that. And I have to confess, I had grown quite fond of little Europa. In fact I had a present for her, a little trinket that I had brought from Thrace.

"Where did you send them?" I asked.

"I sent them where they will never bother you again."

I felt the blood drain from my face. "What have you done, Mother?"

"I killed them," she said. "At least, I killed the brats. That slut saved me the bother of killing her by hanging herself when she found the bodies of her babes."

Her face showed no emotion.

"How?" I whispered. I wish I hadn't asked.

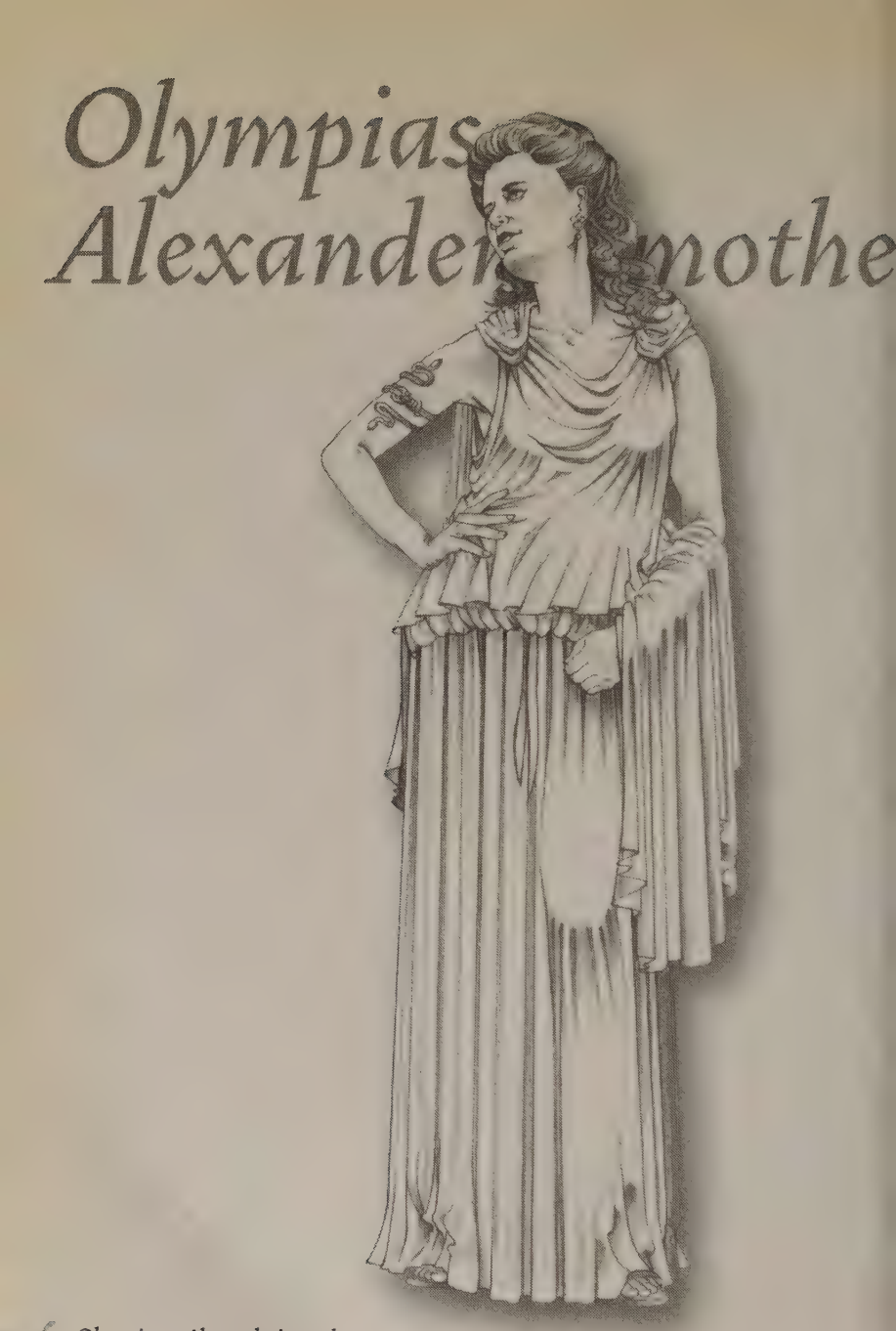
"I pushed them into a burning brazier," she said as calmly as a kitchen servant might speak of strangling fowls.

The gem on my mother's arm caught a late ray of sunlight and was for a moment blood red. One of her pets emerged from the folds of her chiton and slithered onto the floor. There have always been snakes about her—in baskets, on her couch, even in her bed—but for the first time, I saw my mother as others see her: a cold, pitiless woman.

"I did it for you, since you were too squeamish to do it yourself. If you are to remain king, Alexander, you will have to learn to be more hard-hearted. Not all your enemies will run at you with a sword in their hand. Some will devise more subtle ways of destroying you."

She stood up as if she'd grown bored with the topic. "Will you join me for dinner?"

Alexander had had no misgivings about ordering the assassination of his rivals for the throne. He hadn't worried about slaughtering thousands of Thebans either, but he had drawn the line at killing his newborn half-brother. Olympias had no such qualms. She went one step further and had both of Cleopatra's children killed. According to some sources she killed them herself. Alexander was horrified.



Olympias—Alexander's mother

Big Plan

Alexander did not relax after getting Macedonia's neighbours under control. He turned his thoughts to Persia. He liked the idea of conquering this old foe. The conquest of Persia had been his father's idea, but it was one thing that Philip hadn't achieved. This was a way for Alexander to outdo his father and make a name for himself. He decided to take over the Persian campaign on behalf of the Greek world.

When the Persians had invaded Greece in 480 BCE, their success had been short-lived. They burned Athens and destroyed temples, but the Greek navy soon drove them out of Europe. But was the destruction of temples 150 years earlier a strong enough reason to go to war? Or was there another reason why Alexander and his father were keen to conquer Persia?

A chiton was a loose tunic worn by men and women in ancient Greece and Macedonia. It was made of two rectangles of material fastened together at the shoulders and tied around the waist. Men wore them short or long, but women always wore them to the ankle.

In Debt

Philip had not left Macedonia in a good financial state. The country was close to becoming bankrupt. Alexander hadn't improved the situation by abolishing taxes. Revenge may have been Alexander's main reason for wanting to conquer Persia, but it was also a good opportunity to improve Macedonia's finances. The Persian Empire was the biggest

and richest empire in history and its new king was said to have inherited huge amounts of gold and jewels. If Alexander could conquer the Persians he would be able to take all of those riches for himself.

It was a long way to the heart of Persia. All of the lands in between belonged to the Persian Empire. If Alexander's plan was to plunder the cities of Persia, he had a long journey ahead of him.

Good Advice

Alexander very wisely selected two old hands to help him with his campaign. Parmenio and Antipater were two of his father's generals. They had both served Macedonia well.

The first piece of advice these two older, more experienced men gave Alexander was not to go off on a campaign until after he was married and had produced a male heir. They knew that Macedonia would be plunged back into chaos if the king died without a successor. But Alexander was impatient to start his campaign against Persia and ignored their advice.

Off to Asia

It didn't take long for Alexander to get to Asia. All he had to do was march 500 kilometres (310 miles) east to the edge of Europe and then cross the Hellespont. This narrow stretch of sea, which we now call the Dardanelles, is only about two kilometres (1.2 miles) wide.

Alexander appointed Parmenio as his second in command. Antipater was left to look after affairs in Macedonia. Alexander was well aware that he had to leave a part of his army to protect Macedonia and make sure that the Greek states didn't try to regain their independence.

When Alexander first set foot in Asia he was only 22 years old. He commanded an army of nearly 50 000 men. Most of his soldiers were infantry or foot soldiers. Only about 5000 were cavalry.

The Macedonians didn't wear metal armour. They wore a protective tunic made out of leather, which was called a cuirass (pronounced "quir-ass"). Some soldiers did wear metal protectors on their lower legs. These were called greaves.

The Macedonian army was well trained and very disciplined. One of the reasons they could march so fast was that they weren't slowed down by a long baggage train. Most armies in ancient times were followed by a large number of wagons laden with armour, weapons, food, cooking equipment and tents. The Macedonians used some mules to carry tents, firewood and food for the horses, but Philip had forbidden the use of wagons in his army. Macedonian soldiers were trained to carry their own equipment and food supply.

Foot Soldiers

The infantry was divided up into groups called phalanxes, each consisting of about 9000 men. A phalanx was divided into six battalions. Each battalion consisted of men from a

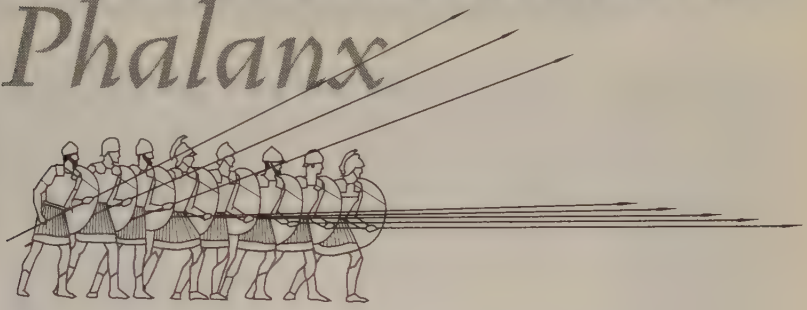
particular Greek city-state or Macedonian tribe. The most important phalanx was the Macedonian phalanx, which was known as the Foot Companions.

The men in each phalanx attacked as a group. This demanded a high level of training and discipline. Members of phalanxes formed into a big block of 16 rows, marching close together. They held their shields out in front of them so that they overlapped, forming a solid wall of protection.

One of the advantages that the Macedonian phalanx had was its weapons. The soldiers were armed with special spears called sarisas. These were long lances made of hard wood from the cornel tree. They were six metres (20 feet) long . The Persians threw their shorter, lighter javelins at their enemies, but the Macedonians held on to their sarisas as they charged. The first five rows of soldiers in the phalanx pointed their sarisas straight ahead. The sarisas were so long that all five rows of weapons pointed out in front of the first row of men. This made them a formidable attack force. It was as if each man in the first row had not one but five weapons. The rows of men behind held their sarisas up at an angle to help deflect any javelins or other missiles falling on them.

Hypaspists were Macedonian infantry soldiers who were not in the phalanx and who carried a spear instead of a sarisa.

The Macedonian Phalanx



Cross-section of the first eight rows of a phalanx

Aerial view of the first five rows of a phalanx

Who was in Alexander's army?

	Where were they from?	What equipment did they use?	What was their job in the army?	How many?
Infantry				
Foot Companions	Macedonia	sarisa or spear sword helmet greaves cuirass small shield	The lead phalanx, the main strike force	14 000
Hypaspists	Macedonia	spear shield helmet boots	Fast-moving foot soldiers who protected the right flank of the lead phalanx—they also had special assignments, such as scaling walls.	4500
Hoplites	Greek city-states	short spear heavy shield bronze armour	Positioned behind Macedonian infantry in the phalanx	10 500
Light Infantry	Greek city-states or other neighbouring countries	javelin sling and stones bow axe	Running foot soldiers specialising in fighting on hilly or rough ground	11 500
Skirmishers	Agrianian tribes	javelin sword shield	Fast and versatile guerrilla fighters	1000
Archers	Crete	bow sword	Fast-moving soldiers who ran out ahead and tried to force the enemy to attack	500

	Where were they from?	What equipment did they use?	What was their job in the army?	How many?
Cavalry				
Companion Cavalry	Macedonia	thrusting spear sword shield cuirass helmet	Shock troops who usually attacked in a close wedge formation from the right	2800
Light Cavalry	Greek city-states	javelin sword	Specialists in scouting ahead or making quick raids	600
Heavy Cavalry	Thessaly	sword cuirass	Protectors of the left flank of the phalanx	1800
Scouts	Thrace	sarisa or spear helmet	Specialists in scouting ahead and spying on the enemy	900
Total				**48 100**

Well Prepared

Alexander's troops didn't only consist of soldiers. He also took political advisers; engineers to build bridges, roads, boats and siege equipment; surveyors who scouted out the best routes and places to camp the massive army; architects to plan new cities; and scientists to collect information about foreign places. There were also cooks, mule drivers, servants, clerks and all the other staff required to keep an army mobile, as well as doctors, poets, philosophers, musicians and historians.

Lying in Wait

The short journey across the Hellespont brought Alexander into the land of Phrygia, which is today part of Turkey. This area had been part of the Persian Empire for around 150 years. Alexander had to march another 50 or so kilometres before he had his first meeting with the Persian army.

Alexander's first clash with the Persians took place on the banks of the River Granicus. The Persians were waiting for him. They had already set themselves up in the best position in the hills on the east bank of the river.

The Persian cavalry was much bigger than Alexander's, but, as Alexander was to prove over and over again, the size of armies was only one factor in winning a battle.

Greek Hoplite

Bigger but not Better

Alexander led the Macedonian army himself and fought alongside his men. His heroic deeds inspired his soldiers. The core of the army was made up of Macedonian men, some who had fought with him in his campaign to subdue the Greek city-states and some who had fought with him earlier at the Battle of Chaeronea. There were also some Greek troops called Hoplites who were specialist heavy infantry. All of Alexander's men were well trained and well-disciplined. They never questioned their orders. They believed in the cause of revenge against the Persians.

The Persian army at Granicus was very different to the Macedonian army. It was not led by King Darius. Most of the soldiers were not Persians. Many were local soldiers who had been forced to join the Persian army. The best fighting units of this Persian army were made up of Greek mercenaries—professional soldiers who fought for payment on the side of anyone who needed an army. The Persian king was a long way away and most of the soldiers would have never seen him. They were led not by one general, but several. One of them was Memnon, a Greek mercenary who had married a Persian princess.

Alexander's Big Battles
Number 1—Granicus

Macedonians		Persians
	Where?	
	East bank of the River Granicus, Phrygia	
	When?	
	May 334 BCE	
	Who?	
Alexander Parmenio	**leaders**	Memnon Mithridates (Darius's son-in-law)
32000	**infantry**	20000
5000	**cavalry**	20000
sarisas swords	**weapons**	javelins scimitars
well-trained, loyal men superior weapons	**strengths**	more cavalry superior position
inexperienced, young leader	**weaknesses**	most soldiers weren't Persian
120	**casualties**	2500 including eight generals
	winner	
	Alexander	

Macedonian Foot Companion

First Blood

Alexander's foot soldiers had to clamber down the steep riverbank and up the other side in order to cross the Granicus as they made their first charge. With Persian arrows raining down on them, it was a bad start for the phalanx. The Persian cavalry, as planned, was busy driving back these forces when Alexander himself led the Companion Cavalry in a charge from the right flank. A Persian force led by King Darius's son-in-law, Mithridates, attacked Alexander and his men. There was fierce hand-to-hand fighting. Alexander's spear was broken, leaving him defenceless until a soldier gave him another spear.

> *Spithridates [a Persian general] came up on one side of him, and raising himself upon his horse, gave [Alexander] such a blow with his battle-axe on the helmet that he cut off the crest of it ... and the helmet was only just so far strong enough to save him, that the edge of the weapon touched the hair of his head.*
> **Plutarch**, *Alexander.*

Alexander was wearing a helmet with two white plumes, so it was easy for the Persian generals to pick him out in the confusion of men. Mithridates threw his javelin at Alexander with such force that it went through his shield and his cuirass. Alexander turned to spear Mithridates. Then another Persian nobleman galloped up behind Alexander and swung his scimitar at him. The great curved blade cut through the king's helmet and grazed his head.

A scimitar is a sword with a curved blade that gets wider towards the point.

Alexander managed to stay on his feet and attack this second assailant. A third Persian came up with his sword raised, ready to finish Alexander off. Fortunately a Macedonian by the name of Cleitus leapt forward and hacked off the would-be assassin's arm with one blow.

No Quarter

The battle turned in Alexander's favour. Darius's son-in-law was killed and many of the soldiers in the Persian army turned and fled. The Greek mercenaries realised that the battle was lost and surrendered. But Alexander considered these men to be traitors. They were Greeks. They should have been fighting with him, not against him. Alexander wouldn't accept the traitors' surrender. He ordered his cavalry to attack them. The Greeks were massacred. From around 20 000 men, only 2000 survived. They were captured and sent in chains to Macedonia to work as forced labour.

Alexander's enemies had learned another important lesson. The King of Macedonia hated traitors.

Close Call

Alexander had won his first battle with the Persians, but because of his reckless heroism the young king had come very close to losing his life. He had been lucky to survive. His grand expedition of conquest could have been very short-lived. If he had died, Macedonia would have been

left without an heir to the throne and fighting would have broken out at home.

But it wasn't a royal Persian army that he'd faced. Alexander had yet to meet the Great King.

Chapter 4

Soothsayers and Ancestors

Temple of Athene, Ilium, Phrygia 334 BCE

I breathed in the fresh sea air. The salty smell was like a tonic. My father used to tell me stories of sailing on the sea when I was a child. I always knew I would love it. The rhythm of the oars slapping the water, the cry of sea birds, the breaking of the waves against the hull—it sounded like music to me. Of course the Hellespont is only a narrow stretch of water, but it was still good to be at sea. Some of the first-time sailors were sick and retching, but the rocking of the boat didn't bother me. I took the helm of the ship myself and when we were halfway across, I sacrificed a bull to Poseidon, God of the Sea, to thank him for a safe crossing.

When we reached the other side I leapt ashore dressed in full armour and hurled my spear into the sand.

"I declare all Asia won by my spear," I cried.

Some of the older generals who served with my father smiled at this. It was rather theatrical and not a little premature, I know, but I have no doubt that in time all lands to the far Ocean will be mine.

I wanted to march off into Asia straightaway in search of Darius. But the tedious business of ferrying my army over to Asia was going to take days and I was too restless to sit in my tent all day. I had learned from Aristotle that ancient Troy wasn't far from this place. I decided to leave the task of bringing over the army in the capable hands of Parmenio. I would go on a little excursion to pass the time.

The **Iliad** *has always been my favourite book. I read it constantly. I have memorised long passages off by heart. In fact I sleep with a copy of it under my pillow in the hope that the bravery and skills of Achilles will be transferred to me. As I looked out over the plain of Troy, whipped by a strong wind, I tried to imagine my hero marching to battle. He could have stood on the very same ground that I stood on.*

In Homer's book, Troy was a great city, but the place I found was just a village. It has even forgotten its noble name and is now called Ilium. Still it is a holy place for me. I have always been inspired by the deeds of Achilles. The locals showed us where Achilles is buried. Tears filled my eyes as I poured an offering of wine on his tomb and draped it with garlands of flowers. Then I

called some of my officers together for a race to honour Achilles. We anointed our bodies with oil and raced naked around the tomb.

Nearby there was a temple dedicated to the goddess Athene. Since I was setting out to war, it seemed only sensible that I visit the temple of the goddess of war. The priestesses welcomed me and I made a sacrifice to Athene. I dedicated my armour to her. It was then that one of the priestesses told me that within the temple were the weapons and armour of Achilles himself. I told her to lead me to them immediately.

My fingers trembled as I reached out to touch these relics from so long ago. An image, faded with the passing of years, was painted on the shield. It was of a 12-headed serpent. Each mouth had bared fangs and a forked tongue. Around the edge of the shield was a pattern of alternating bands of inlaid gold, electrum and ivory. I lifted it up and slipped my arm through the armband. The shield felt as if it was made for me. There was also a breastplate and greaves, both bronze with silver clasps. The bronze helmet had pointed cheek guards etched with battle scenes. On the top of the helmet hung the ragged remains of a horsehair plume.

The weapons consisted of a spearhead (the wooden shaft had long since crumbled to dust) and a double-edged bronze sword. The armour and weapons were as bright as new, even though they were 800 years old or more. These ancient relics have a special meaning for me. Since before I could walk, my mother has always

told me that, through her family, I am a direct descendant of Achilles.

I was suddenly seized with a longing to wear my hero's armour into battle.

"You must give the armour to me," I said to the priestess, "so that I can wear it to fight against the Persian invaders."

She didn't want to let me have it, but she had no way of stopping me.

"It is my birthright," I told her. "Who else can claim to be a descendant of Achilles?"

I ordered my men to take Achilles's armour. I sent for my own shield and cuirass, telling the priestess to put them in the tomb instead.

"One day these will be as famous as the armour of Achilles," I told her.

The Trojan War had happened so long ago that its true history merged with the myths and legends of the Greek gods. The Greeks waged war on the people of Troy when Paris, son of the Trojan king, abducted Helen from her Greek husband. No one knows where the truth ends and the legend starts. Our knowledge of it comes from the book called the *Iliad*, which was written by the Greek poet Homer, who lived 500 years before Alexander.

Outdoing the Past

Alexander loved the idea of wearing the armour of his hero. As it happened, the old armour didn't prove to be very useful. He came close to losing his life at the Battle of Granicus when Persian scimitars and javelins pierced it. After that Alexander had Achilles's armour (now a little worse for wear) carried before him into battle, and went back to wearing his own stronger Macedonian armour.

The armour that Alexander found at Ilium probably wasn't from that ancient battle, but Alexander certainly believed it was. A lot of things Alexander did were because of his desire to achieve great things like heroes such as Heracles and Achilles. He also wanted to outdo his rivals—the ones still living like Darius, and the ones who were dead, like his father and the old Persian king Xerxes.

Seeing the Future

Many of the decisions Alexander made were not based on carefully worked-out tactics. They were made by reading omens. A big part of ancient Greek religion involved keeping the gods happy. This meant giving them regular sacrifices and making sure you didn't upset them. The gods didn't always make their feelings clear to their

According to one of the sources, Alexander wasn't above faking a good omen. Once he wrote on Aristander's hand, so that when the seer laid his hands on the entrails, it left the message "victory will be Alexander's" for all to see.

worshippers. To work out what the gods had in store for him, Alexander employed a seer by the name of Aristander of Telmissus. A seer, or soothsayer, is someone who claims they can tell what's going to happen in the future.

In ancient times, the seer predicted the future by studying the insides of an animal (usually a sheep or a goat) that had been sacrificed to one of the gods. The seer slit open the animal's stomach and examined its insides or entrails. The size and shape of the liver was of particular interest, as were the contents of the stomach. The seer "read" the entrails and reported whether they foretold good or bad fortune.

Soothsayer

Such things as an eclipse, the sudden appearance of an eagle or a change in the weather were seen as signs from the gods. These omens had to be interpreted and that was also Aristander's job. One day while Alexander's men were filling their water jars from a spring, a copper plaque suddenly bubbled up out of the stream of water. The plaque was carved with writing in an ancient language that no one could understand. Alexander immediately sent for Aristander. He was sure it was an omen of some kind. Aristander agreed. He told Alexander it was a good omen. He claimed he could read the writing and that it said that the Persian Empire would be destroyed by the Greeks.

Another time, Alexander's hat blew off into a river. A

soldier, wanting to please his king, jumped into the river to get it back. As he swam to shore, he put the hat on his head to keep it dry. The seer saw this as an omen that someone would defeat Alexander and take his place as king. Alexander rewarded the soldier at first, but then after he'd thought about the symbolism he had him executed.

The problem for Aristander was that he had to keep Alexander happy, so most of the time he decided that the omens were good. But what if he told Alexander that the omens for a particular battle were good and then the battle was lost? He'd be in trouble for giving a wrong interpretation of the omen. Being a seer wasn't an easy job.

Famous Ancestors

All his life, Alexander had been told he was descended from the gods. He had been taught that one of his ancestors on his father's side of the family was Heracles. Heracles (who we also know by his Roman name Hercules) is the hero of Greek mythology who had to complete 12 labours—including killing the nine-headed serpent called Hydra, and finding a tree that bore golden apples. Heracles's father was the god Zeus and his mother was a mortal Greek woman.

On his mother's side of the family, Alexander had learned that he was descended from Achilles. Achilles had fought in the legendary Trojan Wars.

Alexander believed that Heracles and Achilles were real

people and that he was truly descended from them. He wanted to equal his ancestors' deeds—or better still, surpass them. He wanted to be remembered as a hero just like them.

When Alexander said goodbye to his mother before he left to begin his conquest of Persia, Olympias had something to tell him. She said that the rumours were true. Philip hadn't been Alexander's father. His real father was the god Zeus. Olympias told her son that, just before she'd discovered she was pregnant, she had been visited by Zeus in the form of a serpent. Alexander liked the sound of this. It meant that he had nothing to do with Philip, the father who had rejected him. Olympias told Alexander that he should never forget who he was—the son of a god.

A Knotty Problem

Alexander liked a challenge. If anyone told him something was impossible, then Alexander wanted to be the first to do it. One of the most famous challenges he took on was undoing the Gordian Knot.

In a town called Gordium there was an old wagon that was supposed to be the very wagon that had brought a king to the town many centuries before. The yoke was tied to the central shaft of the wagon by a rope made of strips of cornel bark tied in a very complicated knot known as a Turk's head knot. When this knot is tied, the ends of the rope can't be seen. There was a local legend that said whoever untied the knot

would rule Asia. Many people had tried to undo the knot. They had all failed.

Alexander couldn't pass up a challenge like that. He puzzled over the knot for some time, but couldn't work out how to undo it because it was impossible to find the ends. Alexander knew that if he didn't succeed, his men would see it as a bad omen and be discouraged. A crowd of interested local people had gathered to watch the Macedonian king fail just as everyone else had.

Alexander hated failure. He took out his sword and cut through the knot with one stroke. The bark rope fell in pieces. There was a hushed silence. No one was sure how to react. Had Alexander cleverly solved the problem? Or had he cheated? Immediately after the knot was cut (or so the sources tell us) there was a storm with thunder and lightning. Aristander was on hand to interpret this as being Zeus's approval. The crowd cheered. Alexander believed he had undone the knot and the prophecy would be fulfilled. He would become the conqueror of Asia.

Diversion

The visit to Ilium wasn't the only detour that Alexander took. Later in his journey, after Egypt had been added to his empire, he took a much longer side-trip. This time it was a 500-kilometre (310-mile) journey through the desert to the oasis at Siwah.

Alexander went there to visit the Siwah oracle. An oracle is someone or something that can predict the future. At the Siwah Oasis there was a temple dedicated to the Egyptian god Ammon. The Greeks believed Ammon was the same god as Zeus. The oracle at Siwah was known throughout the Greek world. It was believed that its predictions had never been wrong. It was a long way to go to have your fortune read, but Alexander knew that Heracles was said to have visited the oracle. That settled it. He didn't care how far out of his way it was, Alexander was going to Siwah.

He left most of his men camped at Memphis and marched along the coast. Then, with just a small band of infantry, he headed into the desert. It was a dangerous journey through the parched sands of the Libyan Desert. The return trip took six weeks. Their water supply ran out after only four days. There were no streams or wells in the desert, but Alexander always seemed to have luck on his side. It rained and they were saved from dying of thirst.

The fragments of writing that have survived from the original writers of Alexander's history prove that eyewitness accounts aren't always reliable. Alexander's friend Ptolemy wrote that when Alexander was lost in the desert two talking snakes helped him find the way out.

Then they ran into a sandstorm that erased all trace of the caravan route that they were following and covered up any landmarks that might have helped them find their way. They were completely lost. But Alexander had another stroke of

luck. He followed a flock of birds. They led him right to the Oasis.

Oracle

The oracle at Siwah wasn't a person. It was a rock. This very ancient piece of stone had been carved into a cone shape and studded with emeralds. The stone sat on a bed made of gold and shaped like a boat. Alexander told the head priest what his question to the oracle was. The head priest went into the chamber where the oracle was kept and repeated the question. Other priests lifted the bed. The head priest watched the bed for any movement. If it moved forward the oracle's answer was "yes". If it moved backward, the answer was "no".

... the image of Orpheus ... made of cypress wood was seen to sweat in great abundance ... Aristander told [Alexander] that ... it signified he should perform acts so important and glorious as would make the poets and musicians of future ages labour and sweat to describe and celebrate them.
One of Aristander's positive predictions, **Plutarch,** *Alexander,*

Alexander didn't tell anyone what it was he'd asked the oracle. When he came out of the temple, he just announced that he was very happy with the answer he got. The ancient historians believed that he asked the oracle if he truly was the son of Zeus. It seems Alexander got the answer he wanted.

Son of God

Alexander had worn Achilles's armour. He had followed in

the footsteps of Heracles. The oracle had confirmed that he was the son of Zeus. There was no stopping him now.

On the one hand Alexander was a general who expected to live the harsh life of a soldier. He was a king prepared to fight at the frontline, putting himself at huge personal risk. At the same time he believed he was the son of a god, who was taking part in a contest with his legendary heroes. Expanding the borders of his empire was just a way for him to measure his success against that of his rivals—his father and Darius—and his heroes—Achilles and Heracles. Alexander wouldn't rest until he had outdone everyone and become the greatest hero in history.

Chapter 5

King versus King

Tarsus, Cilicia, September 333 BCE

The plain of Cilicia is the hottest place I have ever been in my life. It was like being baked in an oven. Not a breath of air stirred. But I couldn't delay—I had to get to Tarsus. The Persians would burn the city to the ground if they knew I was coming. With a battalion of hand-picked men I raced to get there as soon as possible. The more we spurred the horses on, the more dust we raised. That was a worry too—the cloud of dust would announce our approach hours before we arrived. I urged the men to spur the horses even harder and I thanked Zeus that I had chosen to rest Bucephalas. He is a strong horse and would have survived, but I would have hated to see him so distressed. The poor beasts that carried us across that desolate plain were nearly dead from exhaustion. Their

hooves were bleeding. We had travelled more than 700 stades that day.

We reached Tarsus just in time. Soldiers of the Persian garrison were about to set flame to houses, but our furious speed frightened them off. The horse I was riding was close to collapse. And though I wouldn't have admitted it to anyone, so was I. The River Cyndus flows right through the middle of Tarsus. I was covered in dust congealed with sweat. I was parched as well. The waters of the river looked inviting. I stripped off my sweat-stained tunic and plunged into the river.

My breath was sucked from me. The water was ice cold, like new-melted snow. The cold froze my legs, penetrated my bones. My limbs locked in painful cramps and I was unable to move them. The fast-flowing waters pulled me under. I sank like a stone.

The next thing I knew, I was being carried into my tent. Consciousness came and went. I was in my bed, with a dozen anxious faces hovering above me. This is it, I thought. I shall die an inglorious death. No one will remember my deeds, because I haven't had time to accomplish any. If I'm remembered at all, it will be as the king who died while taking a bath.

I woke again. Different faces were staring down at me. It seemed some time had passed. I could hear the men lamenting outside my tent, as if I were already dead. Was anyone standing guard? Had scouts been sent out? This is what I wanted to say, but I couldn't form the words. At this rate Darius would be upon us and we would be defeated without a blow struck.

"Heal me," I said. Or at least I mouthed the words. The physicians around me drew away. I could read their thoughts. They thought I was close to death. If they administered some medicine and I died, their own lives would be at risk. Not one of them was brave enough to try and save me.

One face came closer, wiping my fevered brow with a cool cloth. The features came into focus. It was Philip the Acarnanian. He has been my physician since I was a child. I grabbed at his tunic.

"Philip," I managed to whisper, "give me a remedy. I would rather die as a result of an untested cure than be humiliated by Darius."

He looked at me. "I will give you a purge, Sire," he said. "It is drastic, but I believe it will cure you."

"Then prepare the draught," I said and drifted into blackness.

When I came to again, Philip was no longer there, but a messenger had arrived. He brought a letter from Parmenio.

I asked one of the pages to help me sit up. I broke the seal and held the piece of papyrus in my shaking hands. All I could see was a blur.

"Read it to me," I said.

"Do not trust Philip the Acarnanian," the page read. "I have heard that he plans to poison you and claim Darius's reward."

I grabbed the letter from him, peering at the words, trying to make them come into focus. I'd heard of the reward Darius was offering to anyone who would assassinate me. Ten thousand talents and the hand of his sister. It was a tempting offer, but I trust my men.

At that moment, Philip came back into the tent. He held out a cup. It contained a thick, dark liquid. I looked at the face of this doctor who had nursed me through childish illnesses and the broken bones of youth. I took the cup and swallowed the foul-tasting contents in one gulp. I handed the letter to Philip.

"Have I been wise or not?" I asked.

Philip glanced at the note.

"Let the draught do its work," Philip said. His face was calm.

My stomach suddenly convulsed. I fell back on the bed in agony. The draught was undoubtedly doing its work. But what was its purpose, to cure me or kill me?

Fortunately for Alexander (and for Philip), he recovered. Modern doctors think that Alexander may have caught pneumonia when he plunged into the icy river. He survived, but it was almost two months before he was well enough to continue his campaign.

Hit and Run

After the Battle of Granicus, Alexander's reputation spread. His army met very little resistance. The Macedonian army had soon conquered most of Asia Minor (modern Turkey)—lands that had been in the Persian Empire for 200 years.

Alexander's idea of "conquering" a town or city was simple. He appeared on the horizon, the city's governors surrendered, then Alexander removed the Persian governor (known as a satrap) and put a man of his own choosing in his place. Whatever tribute the city had been sending regularly to Persia, whether money or animals, Alexander demanded they now send to him. If the people surrendered without resistance, he more or less left them to carry on as before. Then he moved on to the next city.

Lucky Man

Back at home in Macedonia, things hadn't been going as well. Macedonia was still very short of funds and the Greek city-states were on the verge of turning against Alexander. Memnon prepared the Persian navy to attack Greece. Antipater sent messages to Alexander, begging him to return to defend his country. But if Alexander went back home, the Persians would retake all the lands that he had just conquered. He didn't turn back.

Alexander had left his homeland open to attack. The bickering Greek city-states were unreliable allies. He

had taken a huge risk putting his personal campaign of conquering Persia ahead of defence of his homeland. It could have ended badly, but once again luck was on Alexander's side. Memnon suddenly took ill and died. A Persian general took his place as commander of the Persian navy, but the Greek mercenaries fighting for the Persians didn't trust the new leader. The Great King decided to abandon his plans to invade Greece. Alexander had left the fate of Macedonia to luck, and pure luck had saved it.

Feared

To reach Tarsus, Alexander had had to cross the mountains of southern Turkey. The only way through was via a mountain pass known as the Cilician Gates. This pass was watched by Persian soldiers. It was so narrow it was said that a loaded camel couldn't pass through it. With Alexander's army marching no more than four abreast it should have been easy to defend, but when the Persian guards saw Alexander approach they turned and ran. His reputation was enough to frighten people off. Alexander and his army passed through the Cilician Gates without any resistance.

Communication Breakdown

As Alexander was recovering from his illness, scouts brought news that the Persian army was on the march. This was a very different army than the one Alexander had faced at

the Granicus. The Great King himself lead the cream of his troops—the Immortals, rumoured to be 10 000 strong.

While Alexander was recovering at Tarsus, he had some coins made with his image on one side wearing the ram-horn headdress of Heracles. They were the first of many coins used in Alexander's empire.

Darius had gathered together a huge army including many Greek mercenaries. The Persian army set up camp east of the mountain pass known as the Syrian Gates, which overlooked a plain. This would be the ideal battleground for the large Persian army.

As soon as Alexander had recovered, the Macedonian army left Tarsus and headed east. Parmenio advised Alexander to wait near the town of Issus and let the Persians come to him.

Alexander didn't wait. He was too impatient to meet Darius in battle. He marched down the coast of Syria to the Syrian Gates. He thought that Darius was on the other side of the mountain range just a few days march away. Darius thought that Alexander was still at Issus.

News travelled slowly in those days. The only communications were by men on horseback or by sailing ship. In this mountainous country it was even slower. Both leaders were wrong. Alexander was surprised to hear from the commanders of one of his ships that the Persians weren't where he thought they were at all. They had marched north and were now behind Alexander at Issus.

Alexander used a type of ship called a trireme. These ships were about 35 metres (115 feet) long. They had sails but were mainly propelled by 170 rowers arranged on three levels.

When Darius reached Issus, he was surprised to find only the Macedonian sick and wounded, who Alexander had left behind to recover. Darius cut off the hands of those who could walk and sent them to report to Alexander.

About Face

For once Alexander had been caught off guard. Alexander's men were tired after a long march and unnerved by the news that the huge Persian army had snuck up behind them. Alexander turned his army around and they marched north again until they were almost back at Issus.

There was one thing about this turn of events that was good for Alexander. The plain of Issus was squashed between the mountains and the sea. He chose the narrowest spot, just two and a half kilometres (1.6 miles) wide, to face his enemy. This was a battleground that suited his smaller army.

Before the battle, Alexander made sure his men all had a hot meal and he gave them a rousing speech. He told them that the Persians were soft and used to a luxurious life. He told them that Macedonians were tough because of their training and because they'd been campaigning for so long. Most important of all, they had him to lead them.

Persian Splendour

This was the Macedonians' first glimpse of the real Persian army. It was a spectacular and daunting sight. In front of

the army were priests singing hymns and carrying silver altars burning with sacred fire. They were followed by 365 young men (one for each day of the year) wearing scarlet cloaks. Behind them came the chariot of Ahura Mazda, the Persian god, drawn by white horses led by men with golden whips. Following them were 10 wagons decorated with relief carvings in gold and silver. Then came the huge army.

First was the cavalry, each battalion decked out in the colours of its own region. Then came the Immortals, who wore clothing of purple, blue and yellow. They didn't wear helmets. Instead they wore close-fitting yellow hoods with a length of material wrapped under the chin that they pulled up to cover their mouths in dusty conditions. The hoods had a high top that the ordinary soldiers wore folded over on top of their heads. Only the Great King was allowed to wear the hood standing erect. The most outlandish thing was that the soldiers wore trousers. The Macedonians, who only ever wore tunics, had never seen anything like this bizarre manner of dress before.

The butts of the Immortals' spears were decorated with silver pomegranates. The 1000 members of the king's personal bodyguard had gold pomegranates on the ends of their spears. The Macedonians nicknamed the Immortals "apple bearers" because they thought the spheres looked like apples.

Clash

The Macedonians advanced toward the Persian troops, the phalanx in the middle, Parmenio and his cavalry on the left and Alexander and his companion cavalry on the right. Just as at the Battle of Granicus, there was a river between them and the enemy. As soon as they were in range of the hail of Persian arrows, Alexander and his Companions attacked. His ferocious charge was successful and they managed to beat back the Persian cavalry. The phalanx was not doing so well. Struggling up the steep riverbank, they were unable to keep their tight formation and had to fight hand-to-hand with the Greek mercenaries. In close combat like this, their long sarisas were useless.

To amuse themselves, Alexander's soldiers played a violent ball game called sphaira, which was similar to rugby.

Parmenio was also in trouble. His Thessalian cavalry, fighting near the seashore, were completely outnumbered by Persian horsemen who forced them back over the river. But Alexander and his cavalry were overpowering the Persian Immortals. He had one aim in mind—to reach Darius. The Great King was hard to miss. His high war chariot was bedecked with gold, silver and gems and had a golden eagle with outstretched wings on the front.

Put to Flight

Darius fought back, but Alexander had the upper hand.

The Persians' superior numbers were of no benefit to them on the narrow plain. They were packed in behind the constricted frontline, unable to go to the Persian king's aid. Eventually Darius snatched the reins from his dead charioteer and galloped away. Alexander wanted to chase after him, but he knew the rest of his army was in trouble. He turned on the Persian infantry. The Greek mercenaries now found themselves attacked from the rear by Alexander. The Macedonian phalanx, their discipline as strong as ever, regained their formation and attacked them from the front.

The Persians called the Immortals [were] splendidly bedecked in barbarian opulence: golden necklaces, clothing interwoven with gold, long-sleeved tunics actually studded with jewels.

The Macedonian troops on the other hand provided a different spectacle: horses and men not gleaming with gold, not with multi-coloured clothes, but with iron and bronze.

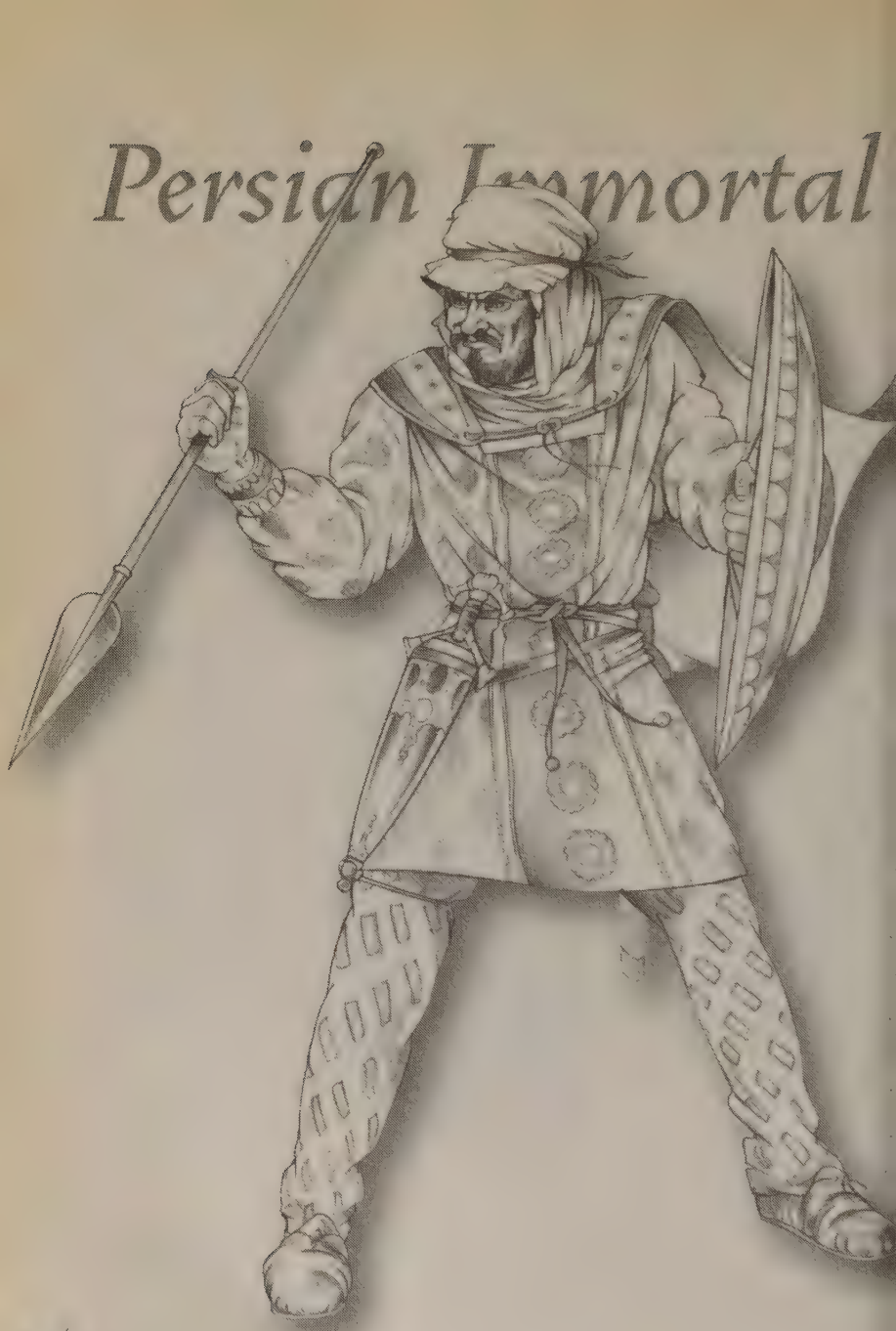
Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander*

With the Great King and his bodyguards retreating, the morale of the Persians failed. The infantry, always the weakest part of the Persian army, had been placed at the rear. When they saw their king retreat, they turned and fled. Soon the Persian cavalry were following the infantry's example.

Alexander's Big Battles
Number 2—Issus

Macedonians		Persians
	Where?	
	Issus, Cilicia	
	When?	
	333 BCE	
	Who?	
Alexander Parmenio	**leaders**	Darius
25 000	**infantry**	50 000 20 000 Greek mercenaries
6000	**cavalry**	28 000
sarisas spears	**weapons**	javelins spears
terrain to Alexander's liking	**strengths**	five times as many soldiers
greatly outnumbered	**weaknesses**	large force squeezed into a narrow space
500	**casualties**	100 000 killed* 15 000 Greek mercenaries deserted
	winner	
	Alexander	

*The sources probably exaggerate the numbers of the Persian army, as well as how many Persians (and how few Macedonians) were killed, to make Alexander's achievements seem even more spectacular.



Persian Immortal

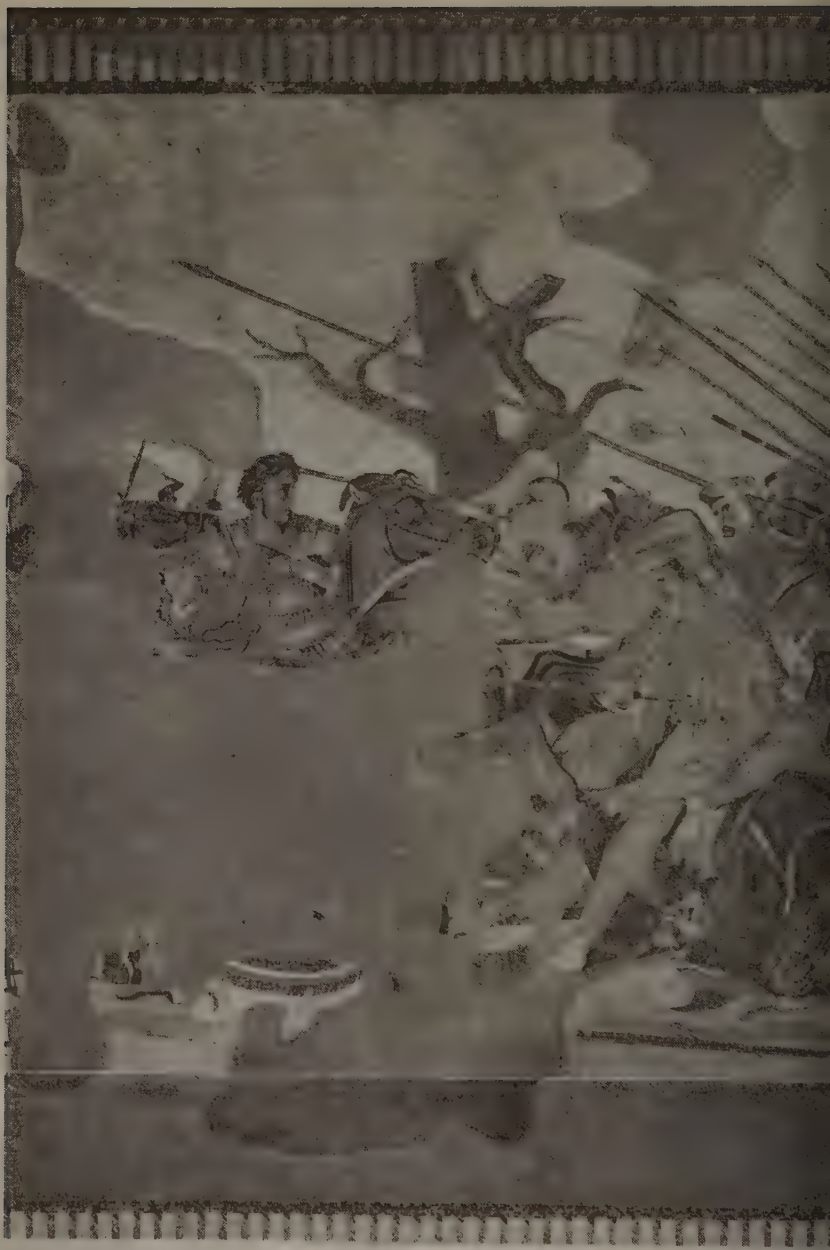
Retreat

The soldiers of the Persian cavalry were heavily armoured. They wore tunics and leggings made of overlapping bronze plates. Their horses were armoured as well. They had bronze headpieces and breastplates. This armour gave them great protection in battle, but slowed them down in retreat. First the riders trampled their own fleeing foot soldiers, then the Macedonians caught up with them and cut them down mercilessly. More Persian soldiers died in the retreat than had been killed in the battle.

A mosaic floor found in Pompeii depicts Alexander facing Darius at the Battle of Issus. The mosaic dates from the 1st century BCE (200 years after the battle), but it is believed to be based on a painting made soon after the event. The mosaic is now in a museum in Naples.

Once again Alexander had managed to turn defeat into victory. His only regret was that Darius had slipped through his fingers again.

It had been a close call for Darius. He had abandoned his chariot and flung off his royal robes so that he wouldn't be so easily recognisable and escaped on horseback. He had left his surviving soldiers to fend for themselves. He had also left behind the royal baggage train. Though Alexander travelled light, the Persian king never went anywhere without a column of wagons loaded with all the luxuries of court. When Alexander reached the Persian camp and entered the Persian king's tent, he found some unexpected spoils of war.



The Alexander Mosaic showing Alexander and Darius at the battle of Issu

Chapter 6

Rags to Riches

Plain of Issus, November 333 BCE

I counted myself rich in Macedonia. The royal family is of course the wealthiest family in the land. But when I came to Darius's tent, I realised that we are poor by comparison to the wealth of Persia. The tent is bigger than the palace at Pella. Above the doorway is a golden symbol of their god supported by giant eagle's wings, all encased in crystal. The terrified slaves fell on their knees as I entered. Inside it was furnished like a palace with tapestries, carpets and cushions. There were couches and caskets of gold, and alabaster vases full of perfume. Spread out before me were tables laid with gold cups and plates ready for a banquet. To one side there was a bath, which I swear was also made of gold.

"This is all in readiness for a victory celebration," I said to

Hephaestion, who had followed me in. "And since we are the victors ..."

"Indeed," he said. "No point in wasting it."

Some of my men got the servants to their feet. With prods and play-acting they made them understand that they should continue their preparations. They filled the bath and I made use of its scented waters. Dressed in a clean tunic, I waved the servants to bring in the food. My officers reclined on silver-footed couches and we celebrated our victory with Darius's wine.

I have never seen so much food in one place, so many different kinds of meat. There was one enormous roasted bird, which one of my scientists told me was an Arabian ostrich. It was all strange to our taste, flavoured with exotic spices, but after months of simple army fare we were happy enough to eat it. We were halfway through the meal when a sudden shrieking and wailing was heard above the sounds of general celebration from my troops.

"Go and see what that noise is, Leonnatus," I said to one of the men. "It's upsetting my digestion."

A few minutes later the wailing started again, even louder. I decided to go and find out for myself what the hubbub was all about.

I entered the next tent. There was Leonnatus trying to make himself understood to a group of Persian women who were clutching at the hem of a gold-embroidered purple cloak and wailing with hysterical grief. I sent for someone who could speak both Persian and Greek, and it was soon revealed that the women

were Darius's family. In his hurry to flee, the Great King had left them behind. One woman, a most beautiful lady, was his wife. The two younger women were his daughters, and the elderly lady was his mother. The cloak they were clasping was the one Darius had flung off. It was dusty and torn. They presumed he was dead.

My interpreter assured them that, as far as we knew, Darius was still alive. They twittered with relief and joy in their strange language, but then fell silent as they realised their own danger. When Hephaestion entered, the older woman flung herself at his feet, thinking that he was me (no doubt because he is taller). She implored him in the Persian language, though what she was saying even the interpreter could not tell because she was muttering into the carpet. When she realised her error, the old woman was horror-struck. She believed she had made a deadly mistake. More wailing and moaning.

"Tell them I mean them no harm," I said. My dinner was lying half-eaten in the next tent. All the noise was giving me a headache. "My war is with Darius, not with his women."

I had no intentions of freeing them, however. Why should I? A bevy of useful hostages had fallen into my hands.

It was clear their tent had been ransacked by my soldiers and all their valuables taken. My soldiers had fought well and they deserve the spoils of war, but I sent instructions for the women's fine clothes, their jewellery and furniture to be returned to them. The old woman was still lying prostrate before me, which was not good for a woman her age at this time of year. I reassured her that she would be treated as befitted her royal status, though I knew she

couldn't understand my words. I was reminded of the time I tamed Bucephalas when I was a child. He didn't understand my words either. It was my actions that had to speak for me. I bent down to help the old woman to her feet.

Suddenly a small figure leapt out from behind a fold in one of the tapestries. It was a little boy waving a miniature sword and shouting out what, from his tone, was clearly a challenge. The women froze in terror, this time not daring to wail or cry out. The child couldn't have been more than five years old. He stood before me, straight and solemn, looking right into my eyes, his little blade pointing at me. He was wearing a childish version of the odd clothing that the Persian men wear—a tunic of bright yellow and purple, and covering his legs, the strange pantaloons made from material of the same colours in a diamond pattern. Over his shoulders was draped a little cloak edged in leopard skin. The blade in his hand was no more than a toy but it flashed bright gold in the torchlight. I didn't need my interpreter to tell me that this was the young son of Darius.

"Tell him I surrender," I said, raising my hands and holding them palms forward, to show him I was weaponless. "Tell him he is the bravest Persian soldier I have ever met. Because of his bravery, I will not harm his grandmother—or his mother and aunts. He has saved them."

The interpreter rattled what sounded like meaningless sounds, but the boy lowered his sword, still staring at me with his solemn eyes.

Then I helped the old woman to her feet and smiled at her.

I went back to my meal. I'm glad that it is the custom of the Macedonian army to leave women at home. It is far too tiresome to have to deal with them while at war.

Alexander was true to his word. He kept Darius's family as hostages, but he made sure they received all the royal privileges that they were entitled to.

As well as the Great King's family, the gold and silver objects and the luxurious furniture, Alexander also found 3000 talents of gold that Darius had left behind. The Macedonians had never seen such riches, but this was just Darius's travelling funds. His main store of treasure and money was still safe in Damascus. Alexander was delighted with what he found. At last he had some money to fund the war.

Naval Control

Alexander had completely outmanoeuvred the Persian king in battle and was keen to defeat him entirely. He wanted to go after Darius, but he knew he couldn't do that yet. The Persian army might be beaten, but the massive navy was still intact. At any moment Darius could order his admirals to sail to the Aegean Sea and attack Macedonia. Alexander wasn't prepared to return to Macedonia to defend his homeland, but he couldn't leave it completely defenceless either. He had to disable the Persian navy. Since he had no navy of his own, he couldn't engage them in a sea battle. He had to attack them a different way.

The Persian ships used the Mediterranean ports of Syria, Phoenicia and Egypt to supply them. If Alexander had control of those ports, the Persian fleet would have nowhere in the Mediterranean where they could get fresh supplies of food and water. It would be completely disabled. Macedonia and the Greek states would be safe.

A Polite Letter

As Alexander marched down the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, a Persian ambassador arrived with a letter from Darius. It offered the Great King's friendship and support if Alexander would be kind enough to give him back his family. He would be prepared to pay a handsome sum for their return. Alexander calmly wrote back to Darius saying

that he had no intention of returning his family. He also said that next time Darius wrote to him, he should address him as "King of Asia". Otherwise he would expect to meet him on the battlefield again.

Darius prepared for another battle with Alexander, but he had to wait a long while. It was two years before the enemies faced each other again. Alexander was busy elsewhere.

The Isle of Tyre

News of the Persian army's stunning defeat travelled fast. Towns in Syria and Phoenicia surrendered to Alexander without a fight. The city of Tyre was ready to surrender too—until Alexander announced that he wanted to make a sacrifice to the city's own god, Melqart. The Tyrians refused to allow him to do this.

"And in the future when you send to me, make your addresses to the king of Asia, and do not correspond as an equal... otherwise I shall make plans to deal with you as a wrongdoer. But if you claim the kingship, stand your ground and fight for it and do not flee, as I shall pursue you wherever you are."

Alexander's letter to Darius, **Arrian,** *Anabasis of Alexander*

Alexander, annoyed at this snub, decided to lay siege to the town. Laying siege involved surrounding the town, allowing no one in or out, and bombarding the walls until the people surrendered or died of starvation. It wasn't easy. The city of Tyre was on an island out of range of Alexander's weapons and siege engines. It was protected not

only by the stretch of water, but also thick walls 45 metres (148 feet) high. The Tyrians had ships. Alexander had very few. The Tyrians could slip away by sea and get supplies from somewhere else. He had to think of some other way of defeating them.

Siege

Alexander never did anything by halves. He sent soldiers out into the surrounding countryside to cut down trees. He set others to breaking up stone buildings nearby. He used the trees and the rocks to build a causeway out to the island. It was a massive job. The sea between Tyre and the mainland was 800 metres (half a mile) wide and six metres (20 feet) deep. It took months. As soon as the causeway was close enough to the island, Alexander ordered his engineers to build siege towers. These wooden towers, as high as the city walls, were wheeled along the causeway so that his archers could rain arrows on the Tyrians. But the Macedonians were also now within reach of Tyrian weapons. They had to continue building the causeway under fire. The Macedonians also set up enormous catapults that flung huge rocks at the walls of Tyre.

The causeway that the Macedonians built to the island of Tyre was not dismantled. Over many years silt collected on it until it formed a permanent peninsula of land. Today there are high-rise buildings built on it.

The Tyrians weren't about to give in, though. They had

some ingenious ideas of their own. They set up screens of padded leather to protect their walls from the rocks, and revolving wheels to deflect arrows. They showered Alexander's men with flaming arrows. When the Macedonians got close to the walls the Tyrians poured hot sand on them, which got inside their leather armour and burned them. They also set some of their ships on fire and sailed them into the causeway to try and burn Alexander's siege engines and the wooden structure of the causeway.

Alexander was wasting a lot of time and effort on the siege and he was getting nowhere.

Instant Navy

The ships and the crews of Darius's powerful navy were not actually Persian. They came from conquered lands with a sea coast, like Phoenicia. News that Alexander had conquered Phoenicia had spread. The Phoenician ships immediately deserted Darius. Other ships from Cyprus also abandoned their positions in the Aegean Sea. All these ships sailed to the port of Sidon, which had already surrendered to Alexander. The sailors were more than willing to serve Alexander, who had freed their homelands from Persian domination. Darius's powerful navy disappeared overnight. Alexander's fleet suddenly grew from 20 ships to 200.

Alexander could now attack Tyre from the sea. When the Tyrians saw his fleet, they decided it was too big for their ships

to attack. They sailed back to the protection of their harbour.

Alexander set battering rams on some of his ships and tried to destroy the walls of Tyre. Eventually the walls were breached. The Macedonian ships then lowered wooden bridges so that soldiers could clamber over, attack the defenders and enter the city. Alexander, as usual, was fighting in the thick of it. The Tyrians were finally beaten.

The siege had lasted for seven months. Alexander was in no mood to be merciful. The Macedonians killed 8000 Tyrians—2000 of them were crucified. The rest of the population, 30 000 men, women and children, were collected up and sold as slaves. Alexander then went to the Temple of Melqart and made his sacrifice. He had finally got his way.

Pharaoh

Egypt was next on Alexander's list of places to conquer. It wasn't hard. When the Macedonian army reached Egypt, cheering crowds gathered to welcome them. Alexander continued on to the northern Egyptian capital of Memphis, where the governor officially handed over the entire country.

Egypt had been under Persian control for nearly 200 years. The Egyptians hated their Persian overlords, who had no respect for their religion and had destroyed temples. They had killed sacred Apis bulls, which to the Egyptians was like killing the gods themselves. Alexander was another foreigner

taking charge of the country, but he was more respectful than the Persians. He made sacrifices to the Egyptian gods and ordered that the Persian-destroyed temples be rebuilt. The Egyptians proclaimed Alexander as their new Pharaoh. Now he was king of Egypt. Without a single spear being thrown, the wealth and riches of Egypt were his.

Great City

Alexander decided that Egypt was the ideal place for a new port. Tyre had previously been the main harbour for trading ships in the Mediterranean Sea. He wanted to build a better one. He chose a place with a deep harbour that was sheltered from the worst weather. It was also close to the Nile delta, from where ships could sail the length of Egypt. He named it Alexandria and personally laid out the plan for the city. He decided that it would have the shape of a Macedonian cloak. He marked out where temples and other important buildings would be.

Aristander the seer was on hand to tell Alexander that the omens were good and the city would be prosperous. He was right. As well as becoming an important port, for centuries Alexandria was also known as a centre for learning, famous for the largest library in the world. It became a multicultural city where scholars—Greeks, Jews and Egyptians—gathered. The city still bears Alexander's name, but he never saw it completed.

Another Offer

Alexander spent the winter months in Egypt, but eventually his thoughts turned back to Darius. The Great King had sent another ambassador to Alexander. This time Darius offered the huge sum of 30 000 talents, all land west of the Euphrates River, as well as his own daughter in marriage, if Alexander would agree to peace between them. Parmenio thought it was an excellent offer, but Alexander wasn't interested. He wrote back that he'd already liberated most of the lands west of the Euphrates, and since he held his daughters hostage, he could marry either of them any time he liked—without Darius's permission.

Alexander had decided it was time to face Darius again. To do that, he would have to march into the heart of the Persian Empire.

Battle Ready

While Alexander had been busy in Egypt, Darius hadn't been idle. He had lost his navy and he had lost his Greek mercenaries, but Darius had spent the time increasing the size of his army by enlisting troops from the eastern lands of the Persian Empire. His cavalry had grown to a massive force of 35 000.

Darius was sure that Alexander would march to Babylon, an important Persian city. But it was never wise to try and predict what Alexander would do. Once he had crossed

the Euphrates River, Alexander didn't turn his forces south towards Babylon. Instead he headed north. When Darius heard of this, he moved his army north and found a battleground that suited him. He made his camp near the village of Gaugamela.

Outnumbered

Alexander marched his army to within a few kilometres of Darius's position and set up his own camp. He allowed his men four days rest. Then before daybreak he moved his entire army to the hills overlooking the plain where the Persian army were already drawn up in battle order. As the day dawned, the full extent of Alexander's enemy was visible below.

This Persian army was like no army Alexander had ever seen before. Instead of the traditional force of infantry supported by a smaller cavalry, Darius's attack force was almost entirely cavalry—and there were so many of them. Alexander estimated that the Persian cavalry was five times as big as his. There was infantry too, but that was stationed far behind the cavalry. Darius didn't think he would be needing their services.

Darius had another surprise for Alexander. He had 200 scythed chariots. These were battle chariots with lethal blades sticking out from the wheels. Their purpose was to charge through infantry and cavalry alike, slicing the flesh of

men and horses as they thundered through them, disrupting their enemy's battlelines. The Persians had levelled any uneven spots on the plain to make it smoother for the scythed chariots. If that wasn't daunting enough, there were also massive creatures with sharp tusks. Alexander's men had never seen anything like them before. They were elephants.

The Eve of Battle

Alexander spent the day in his tent, trying to think of a plan to overcome this vast enemy. Evening approached and Alexander showed no signs of preparing to attack. The Persian generals began to worry that the Macedonians were planning a night attack. Perhaps Alexander even spread the rumour to encourage this idea. The Persian generals kept their troops ready in battle position all through the night.

The Macedonians were instructed to get a good night's sleep. Alexander, however, plotted into the night. If Darius had come up with a different battle plan, Alexander had to think of a better one. He did. In fact Alexander was so sure he had the answer that he went to bed and slept so soundly that his men had to wake him the following morning.

Chariot Charge

The next morning the two armies faced each other on the plain. Both armies advanced slowly, neither wanting to be the first to charge. Eventually, Darius had to make a move or

he would have advanced right over the area he had carefully prepared for his scythed chariots. The Persian right wing attacked, led by a general by the name of Bessus who came from the eastern country of Bactria. On the left, the charge was led by the Persian general Mazaeus. The massive Persian cavalry swarmed around the Macedonians. The Macedonians were outnumbered—but not overwhelmed.

Darius ordered the scythed chariots to attack. This was intended to terrify the Macedonians, but they dealt with the attack surprisingly well. The infantry made spaces for the charging chariots to pass through their lines and then closed in behind them. They showered the horses with javelins and stabbed the drivers with spears. The scythed chariot attack failed completely.

Against the Odds

As the Persians continued to concentrate their forces on the Macedonian cavalry on the left and right, a small gap opened in their centre. This is what Alexander had been waiting for. He formed his cavalry into a wedge, with himself and his Companions at the sharp end, and broke through the Persian centre. Alexander's goal was Darius, visible through the churning dust in his war chariot.

Once again the Great King decided to flee. Once again the Persian army's resistance crumbled. Once again Alexander couldn't pursue Darius. Parmenio and his men were still in

trouble on the left. Alexander had to go to their rescue.

Miraculously, the Macedonians had beaten the massive Persian army despite being hugely outnumbered. But Alexander had still not achieved his most important goal. The Persian survivors fled in chaos. Bessus followed his king. Mazaeus took refuge in the city of Babylon. Darius had escaped again, disappearing deep into Persia.

The Road to Babylon

Alexander marched on towards Babylon. When the Persian general Mazaeus saw Alexander's army approaching, he came out to meet them, surrendering the city without a fight. The Babylonians were just as pleased as the Egyptians to be rid of their Persian overlords, who had ruled over them for 200 years. Alexander entered the city through the splendid Ishtar Gate, which was made of blue glazed bricks with relief sculptures of hundreds of lions and dragons. The Babylonian people cheered, threw flowers in Alexander's path and burned frankincense on silver altars to honour him. The governor of the city gave over all the gold in the treasury to Alexander. He also had gifts for the conqueror including lions and leopards in cages. There were musicians and singers. Alexander honoured

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The gardens didn't actually hang. They were planted on the terraces of the citadel. From a distance fully-grown trees could be seen high above the city walls.

the Babylonian gods—and took charge of the gold in the Babylonian treasury.

Alexander allowed his army a month's holiday in this city. The Macedonian soldiers visited the tourist spots such as the Hanging Gardens and the Palace of Nebuchadnezzar. Used to a hard and simple life, they revelled in the luxury and pleasures of Babylon. The Babylonians knew how to enjoy themselves. They threw endless parties and the Macedonians indulged themselves in wine, women and food.

The stories of Persia's legendary wealth had proved true. Money was not a problem for Alexander any more.

Alexander's Big Battles
Number 3—Gaugamela

Macedonians		Persians
	Where?	
	Gaugamela, Armenia	
	When?	
	331 BCE	
	Who?	
Alexander Parmenio	**leaders**	Darius Bessus Mazaeus
40 000	**infantry**	200 000
7000	**cavalry**	35 000
sarisas	**weapons**	javelins 200 scythed chariots
good discipline Alexander's military genius	**strengths**	cavalry five times bigger
smaller number of cavalry	**weaknesses**	poor discipline
1000 infantry 200 cavalry	**casualties**	53 000
	winner	
	Alexander	

Chapter 7

Royal Purple

Apadana Palace, Susa, Susiana, December 331 BCE

Today I entered Susa. I had sent General Philoxenus ahead and Susa had surrendered without a fight. It should have been a day of triumph as my army took possession of this great Persian city, but it has left me feeling bad-tempered instead.

This city has grown around the winter palace, which was built by one of Darius's ancestors. The palace is very impressive, I have to admit. Everything is on such a grand scale. The ceilings are so high it is difficult to make out the patterns carved on them. They are supported by massive columns some 80 feet high. There is nothing to match it in Macedonia, not even in Greece, where everything is on a more human scale. There are three very pleasant interior courtyards deep inside the palace, yet open to the sky. The

walls are made of bricks glazed with different colours, mostly blue, and with relief designs of the Immortals in ceremonial dress and of strange winged lions.

The satrap, a fat man who sweated a lot, handed over the mountains of talents in the treasury, but I left my men to take care of packing all the gold and treasure. Then there was the incident with the throne. It irks me to remember it. I have proved that a man does not have to be tall to be great. My deeds speak for me, but it was still embarrassing to have my feet dangle like a child's as I sat on Darius's bejewelled throne.

A messenger arrived with letters from home. I went to a quiet corner of one of the courtyards to read a letter from my mother. She also sent me a length of purple woollen cloth that my sisters had woven. She seemed to think I would be in need of a new cloak. I'm quite happy with my old one, even if it is a little torn and faded.

I had a sudden idea that the cloth would make a nice present for Darius's mother. She is a pleasant old woman, more intelligent than you would expect for a barbarian female. I have had some pleasant conversations with her. I guessed she would be unhappy today. Her ancestors took many generations to gather together the treasure held at this palace. Today she had the misfortune to witness it disappear in a single day into the hands of a foreign king. It must be humiliating for her.

I sought her out. Her servants were setting up her personal furniture and possessions in her old rooms in the Palace. She did indeed look miserable.

"Here, mother," I said. "I have a gift for you."

I handed her the length of purple cloth. She was speechless. She stared at the cloth and then began to weep. I thought she was touched by my generosity.

"My own sisters wove this cloth," I told her. "I could send for Macedonian weavers. Perhaps your granddaughters could learn this skill."

She uttered some words in a harsh voice that sounded far from grateful. I sent for the interpreter, as this situation seemed to call for more than gestures.

It seems that I have insulted her enormously. Apparently Persian women of high birth consider any form of work, even handiwork, to be totally beneath them. I now know that they have a particular distaste of handling wool.

I have tried hard to make the Persian royal women happy. I don't even sit down in their presence without their permission. I refuse to allow them to prostrate themselves in front of me. I have done everything to make them comfortable.

I went back to the treasury. The clerks and chamberlains were hauling out a number of dusty, old chests that they had found at the back of one of the vaults. I was in need of a diversion, so I stayed to watch as they broke the locks. The lids were lifted and the smell of honey and sesame filled the room. Inside each chest were, not as I had expected piles of gold coins, but huge rolls of purple cloth. The inscriptions on the chests recorded when the cloth had been packed away. It was almost 200 years ago, but you would

never know it to look at the cloth. It is as bright and fresh as if it was just woven yesterday, its colour preserved by a preparation of honey and oil. It is fine cloth and some has threads of gold woven through it. They haven't measured the length of it yet but the clerks say there must be all of 5000 talents of cloth. It is worth almost its weight in gold.

The clerks were thrilled with this find, exclaiming over it like children. My cheeks burned as I looked at this incredible wealth. The Persian Queen Mother must think I am the barbarian. This morning, I thought the cloak-length of purple cloth was a treasure. To her it must have seemed like a worthless scrap.

Word of my blunder has spread like a grass fire. Everywhere I go I see lowly Persian slaves suppressing smiles. The Persian priests make no attempt to hide their mirth.

I am tired of struggling to understand the words and ways of the Persian women. I will leave them here in Susa. I will arrange for tutors to teach them Greek. Then they can struggle to understand me.

Though Susa caused Alexander some embarrassing moments, it was another Persian city that had fallen without a fight. This time the gifts presented to him by the city's governors included camels and elephants. In the treasury, there was a staggering 50 000 talents of gold and silver, plus another 9000 talents in coins. There were also some of the statues that Xerxes had stolen from Greece 150 years earlier.

Alexander arranged to have them returned to Greece.

To the Macedonian soldiers, this wealth was unimaginable. And they hadn't even reached the capital of Persia yet.

Unpopular Choice

Alexander wasn't very interested in the government of his growing empire. Whenever he conquered a new city, he always appointed someone to govern it. Often it was one of his own men, a trusted officer, who got the job. On his journey of liberation through the more remote parts of the Persian Empire, if a city's inhabitants had welcomed him, he sometimes left the current leader in charge, as long as they pledged their allegiance to him.

In Babylon he had shocked his men by choosing a Persian to take charge of the city's government. Not only was he a Persian, it was Mazaeus. Here was a man who had fought against them at Gaugamela, killing many of their comrades. It made no sense at all to them that Alexander had put an enemy in charge of Babylon, the place he had chosen to be his own capital in Asia.

There was only one source of purple dye in ancient times, which was a particular kind of sea snail. It was so rare and so expensive that only very rich people could afford it. That's why purple became the colour of royalty. The purple cloth that Alexander found at Susa was worth the equivalent of millions of dollars today.

Rumblings

The mood of the Macedonian soldiers was changing. They had fully supported Alexander's quest to regain the Greek settlements in Asia Minor. They could understand that there was a need to humiliate the Persians and take from them as

much gold as they could. They'd achieved all that and more. They had been marching through foreign lands for three whole years. Some were beginning to think it was time to go home.

The soldiers thought they deserved a rest, but even though it was winter, Alexander was keen to move on. The soldiers soon found themselves marching through snow-covered mountain passes. Their mood wasn't improved when they found their way blocked at the pass known as the Persian Gates by a local general and a band of Persian soldiers. Alexander ordered his men to attack, but it was one of his few errors of judgement. The Persians showered Alexander's men with arrows and javelins. They rolled boulders down the slopes. Many of Alexander's men were killed and he was forced to retreat.

Alexander now gave his position much more serious thought. He had managed to capture a few Persians and from them he learned that there was another way through the mountains. It was no more than a mountain track, but now that Alexander had set his brilliant military mind to the task, it was just the information he needed. He left one of his men, Craterus, with two battalions and some cavalry, and set off along the mountain track with the rest of his army. He told Craterus to keep all the campfires lit, as if the whole army was still there. Alexander himself continued marching until he came to a position behind the unsuspecting Persian army.

At this point he ordered his trumpeters to sound a signal and the Persians found themselves being attacked from different directions. Almost all of the Persians were killed. Now Alexander's road to Persepolis was clear.

Splendour

Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of Persia. Everything about this city was on a huge scale. Palaces and temples were built on the Great Terrace, a massive man-made stone platform 12 metres (40 feet) high. The terrace, 300 metres (1000 feet) wide and 450 metres (1480 feet) long, was reached by way of a double stairway built with wide shallow steps so that horses could walk up them. Relief sculptures showed rows and rows of people from all the nations of Persia carrying tribute to the Great King. At the top of the stairway was the gigantic Gate of All Nations. On either side were colossal stone bulls. Built on the Great Terrace were a number of palaces and a huge audience room where the Great King had received tribute from the nations he had conquered. The doorways were 12 metres (40 feet) high.

This hall was big enough to hold 10 000 people. The carved cedar-wood roof was supported by 72 enormous stone columns that were 20 metres (66 feet) high, each topped with two griffin heads. The gates and doorways had golden handles and the halls were decorated with wall paintings, tapestries and coloured tiles.

Sacked City

As with Babylon and Susa, the city of Persepolis offered no resistance to Alexander. The people of Persepolis, native Persians who lived at the heart of the Persian Empire, didn't welcome Alexander, but they allowed him to enter without a fight. The city's governors handed over the contents of the treasury—the unbelievable sum of 120 000 talents. Alexander now had so much gold that its value started to lose meaning to him. Over the rest of his campaign the gold ran through his fingers like sand as he sent money back to Macedonia, gave lavish gifts to his officers and re-equipped his army more generously.

Altogether Alexander collected around 180 000 talents in Persia—equivalent to 468 tonnes of gold.

Alexander was aware of his soldiers' unrest. The Macedonians had long been promised rewards beyond their soldiers' pay. He gave his men full permission to loot the city. They went berserk. They looted the houses of the wealthy citizens of Persepolis, taking all the gold and silver they could find. Marble statues and ornaments were smashed to pieces. They killed any male citizens that they came across and collected up the women and children to sell as slaves.

Alexander had no intention of using Persepolis as the capital of his empire. He stripped the palaces of everything of value and packed up all the treasure ready to be sent back to Babylon.

Palace in Flames

Alexander and his men stayed at Persepolis for four months, partly to allow the men to rest, partly to wait until the weather improved. Towards the end of the stay, someone set fire to the Palace of Xerxes during a wild party. Some of the sources suggest that it was Alexander himself who, in a drunken spree, lit the fire. The entire palace was destroyed.

Alexander had changed. Was it because the Persians had not accepted him as their king? Was it to pay back the Persian priests who had made it clear that they thought Alexander was a barbarian heathen? Or was it to impress his own men, a final act of revenge for the burning of the Acropolis in Athens? Perhaps Alexander had started to believe his own propaganda. He was, after all, King of Asia, Pharaoh of Egypt, and the son of Zeus. As far as Alexander was concerned, no one had any right to oppose him.

Though many irreplaceable artefacts were destroyed in the Persepolis fire, some things were preserved by it. Persians wrote on unbaked clay tablets that crumbled to dust over time. Some of these tablets were baked in the fire. This allowed them to survive. Historians have been able to learn a lot from them.

Darius on the Run

There was one thing that Alexander still had to do to prove to the world that he was truly the King of Asia. He had to defeat Darius, who still considered the title to be his. Darius had been beaten twice, but he was preparing to face

As for Persepolis, the capital of the Persian kingdom, Alexander described it to the Macedonians as their worst enemy among the cities of Asia... It was the wealthiest city under the sun and the private houses had been filled for a long time with riches of every kind. The Macedonians rushed into it, killing all the men and plundering the houses, which were numerous and full of furniture and precious objects of every kind. Here much silver was carried off and no little gold, and many expensive dresses, embroidered with purple or with gold, fell as prizes to the victors.

Diodorus, *Historical Library*

Relief sculptures from the Great Terrace at Persepolis

The Persian Royal Road reached from Sardes in Lydia (now part of Turkey) to Persepolis in the heart of Persia. It was 2500 kilometres (1550 miles) long.

Alexander again. Darius had gone to the Persian summer capital of Ecbatana, where other generals and Persian nobles had joined him, and he had gathered together a new army. The Persian army was just a shadow of its former might, though—only a few thousand men.

Parmenio was given the task of carrying all the Persian treasure to Ecbatana. There was so much of it that he needed 5000 camels and 20 000 mules to carry it. Meanwhile Alexander set out in pursuit of Darius. When the Persian king heard of Alexander's approach, his confidence disappeared. He fled from Ecbatana and headed to all that remained of the once great Persian Empire—the mountainous eastern regions.

The Royal Road

Darius was a long way ahead, but Alexander didn't have to use mountain tracks any more. He followed him along the Persian Royal Road. No doubt Alexander thought back to his enquiries about this road when he was a child. Now he was marching an army along it at top speed. They covered almost 30 kilometres each day. Persian deserters were coming in the opposite direction and surrendering to them. They told Alexander the latest news about Darius. Alexander was about to have his final meeting with Darius, but it was nothing like he'd imagined it would be.

Chapter 8

Plots and Paranoia

Hecatompylos, Hyrcania, July 330 BCE

These last days have been filled with disappointment. Darius is defeated, but it was not the way I would have wished it. I had hoped to catch up with him before he reached the Caspian Gates, but I was too slow. The Gates were undefended but Darius had passed through them, retreating to his eastern lands.

I had sent a unit off to search the surrounding land for provisions. That was when I received news from my scouts. There was dissent among the Persians. A power struggle. Darius was losing his grip. I set out again before the unit returned with food. I got my commanders to seek out local men who might know a shortcut. I found some willing to lead me across the desert. There

was no water on the way, they said, but I didn't care. I needed speed or I would lose Darius again. I left behind my entire infantry, racing on with just 6000 cavalry. I would have been in trouble with so few men if we had found the Persian army drawn up to face us, but I threw forethought to the four winds. While Darius was free he could still claim the title of King of Persia.

Soon we came across deserters, Mardians and Babylonians, who had given up the fight and were returning home. From them we heard the news that Bessus, one of the generals from the east of Persia, had taken control of the Persian army. He had arrested Darius.

I have never ridden faster in my life. Men fell from their horses through lack of sleep and food. Horses dropped dead along the roadside, but I allowed no halt until noon the next day. My men have not the strength to match me. Not more than 60 of them were able to keep up. It is very discouraging. So few of them have the drive needed for ultimate victory. I made them ride day and night for three days. They are Macedonians. They should be able to withstand such hardships.

Then we came upon the debris of the fleeing army. Such costly rubbish I have never seen before. They must indeed be terrified of me to leave such valuables behind. Cups and vases of gold and silver were strewn by the side of the road. We passed a cartload of women, abandoned by their driver. We met more retreating soldiers walking wearily without arms—Persians who had given up the fight. They surrendered to us. I knew that I was within a few hours of defeating Darius.

With the coming of dawn I could make out a dust cloud ahead. It was too small to be raised by the wind. My heart lifted. The Persian troops were in a hurry. They were retreating. Yet again we had inspired fear. I spurred my horse and forbade any talk of stopping for rest. Then I noticed a strange thing. The dust cloud was dividing in two. I thought at first it was because of some fluke of the desert wind. Then I realised that the Persian army had split. One part was going north, the other east. This was a good sign. It meant there was panic and indecision. But which dust cloud would I follow? Which fleeing band contained Darius?

The desert relented a little and allowed some scant vegetation. Just a few green blots in the sandy landscape. The men begged me to stop. I didn't want to lose any time, but I knew that even if I could survive without water, my horse could not.

There was no waterhole visible, no stream, but an abandoned oxen cart had wandered off the track. The oxen had their heads down, as if drinking. The men were hoping the beasts had found a small spring. They ran to it. I shouted orders, that we would halt for no more than a few minutes. I was annoyed when a soldier by the name of Polystratus called me over to the abandoned Persian wagon.

"We have no time for looting," I snapped, though I couldn't imagine there was anything of value in that dilapidated wagon.

"I think you will want to see this, Sire," he said.

I went over. It was no more than a farm cart with a rustic cover of animal hide. One wheel was askew. I looked under the cover.

There was a body, a bearded man stuck with javelins. The cloak that covered him was soaked with blood. I drew closer. I had only glimpsed him twice before, in the heat of battle, but I knew at once who it was. If I had any doubts, the golden chains that bound his hands and feet dispelled them. It was Darius.

I shouted to Polystratus to fetch water in his helmet. I gently pulled out the deadly javelins and lifted off the bloody cloak. I held the water to Darius's lips, but he did not drink. His body was warm and blood still flowed from his wounds, but I was too late. My rival was dead, betrayed by his own men.

I covered his body with my own cloak. Polystratus told me that Darius had whispered a few words before he died, but he didn't know what they meant because he didn't understand Persian.

I sat on the edge of the cart, suddenly overcome with weariness. I felt no joy or triumph, only sorrow. It is a sad end for a king, to die alone, abandoned and betrayed, with only his enemy to hear his last words.

Darius's death was a letdown for Alexander. It had not been achieved in a glorious battle. He had not been able to defeat the Great King with his bravery and clever military mind. Instead Darius's traitorous generals had done the job for him. Alexander sent Darius's body back to Persepolis with orders to bury him in royal style in a tomb among his ancestors.

Discontent

All of Alexander's goals had been attained. Greek and Macedonian pride had been restored, the Great King had been brought to his knees, and the great cities of Persia and all their wealth and treasure were in Alexander's hands. The Macedonian army had gone further into Persian territory than anyone before them. Yet still Alexander didn't want to turn back.

There was more than a quiet rumbling of discontent from his army this time. Alexander had discharged the Greek mercenaries, giving each of them a huge bonus to reward them for their loyalty. A rumour spread that everyone was to go home. The Macedonians started to pack up and pull down their tents.

Alexander sent for his officers. This was not the end of their campaign, he told them. Bessus was now claiming that he was King of Persia. The title was still not Alexander's. If they walked away now, the lands they had worked so hard to conquer would be taken straight back again. There was still work to be done.

Persuasive

Alexander was a convincing speaker. He managed to persuade his officers that they should go on. Then he went out and addressed his men. He told them what a good job they'd done so far. He said that if he thought it was possible

he'd be the first on his way home to see his mother and sisters. But if they left Bessus on the loose, before they knew it he'd be attacking their homes and families in Macedonia. He told them that the Persians were like wild animals. They needed taming and that would take time. All they had to do was march for another four days over flat easy ground and round up these few renegades. Then the job would be done and they could all go home.

When the soldiers heard Alexander's words, they were totally won over.

Change of Plan

Alexander and his army set off east. They faced little resistance. Persian generals and local people alike surrendered to the all-conquering Macedonians. The men looked forward to a quick finish for this mop-up operation.

We don't know at what point Alexander changed his mind about the reason for his journey. When he left Macedonia he said it was a journey of revenge. Then it became a journey to free all the Greek cities in Asia from Persian domination. By the time he reached Persia he had decided that he wanted to be King of Asia.

Alexander had won over his own men. Now he had to win over the conquered Persians. He could force them to submit to him, but as soon as he moved on they would rebel. He wanted them to accept he was their king.

First of all he pardoned all the Persian generals who had surrendered to him—even those who had been involved with overthrowing Darius. He introduced Persians into his followers, not just servants, but noblemen as well. He even made Darius's brother a member of the elite Companions. Previously, only Macedonians had been allowed that honour.

Fancy Dress

That wasn't all. Alexander also started to wear Persian dress. As well as the band of gold that was the crown of Macedonia, he also wore the purple and white headband (known as a diadem) that was the symbol of the Persian king. He wore a white-striped Persian tunic and ordered his Companions to wear scarlet robes, the same as Persian courtiers. His men were horrified. As far as they were concerned, they were the conquerors and the Persians should be dressing in Macedonian style, not the other way around.

Throughout the camp one sentiment and one view found expression, that they had lost more by victory than they had gained by war, and that at that very moment they were experiencing defeat, surrendering to the ways of aliens and foreigners. How could they face people, they asked, returning home dressed like captives?

The Macedonian soldiers' view on dressing like Persians, **Quintus Curtius,** *History of Alexander*

By dressing in Persian clothes and allowing Persians to become part of his army, Alexander was trying to convince the Persians that he was worthy of being their king. At the same time,

these activities were offending the Macedonians.

Alexander was trying to please everyone. He wore some Persian clothes and some Macedonian clothes. He had the seal on his ring for documents to be sent to Macedonia, but he had a separate seal as King of Persia for documents within Persia. The Macedonians were fiercely proud of their history and culture. They didn't like the idea of their king taking on foreign ways.

Different Styles

Macedonian and Persian dress were very different from each other. Macedonian men wore short tunics. On their heads they wore a felt hat called a kausia, which was a bit like a beret. Their legs were bare, apart from the metal greaves they wore to protect them when they were fighting. They either went barefoot or wore laced sandals.

The Persians wore knee-length tunics and leather shoes. It was what they wore under their tunics that was really different. They wore trousers. Nothing set the Persians apart from the Macedonians more than this item of clothing. The trousers were decorated with multicoloured patterns. The Macedonians thought trousers were barbaric. Even Alexander drew the line at wearing trousers. They were too outlandish.

Murderous

It wasn't only Alexander's dress that changed. His attitude was different as well. He no longer seemed to be sure who were his enemies and who were his friends. He was suspicious even of his closest friends. A rumour spread that someone was plotting to assassinate Alexander. Philotas, one of Alexander's commanders, didn't believe the rumour and didn't mention it to Alexander. When word of the plot came to Alexander's ears, he decided that Philotas must be involved in the scheme. The commander was tortured until he confessed. Then he was stoned to death. Philotas was Parmenio's son.

Alexander created many cities and garrisons that bore his name—perhaps as many as 30 places were named Alexandria. Some of these places are still towns and cities today, but the Alexandria in Egypt is the only one that has retained the name.

The old general, now in his 70s, had served Alexander and his father for decades. Parmenio hadn't always agreed with Alexander, but he had proved his loyalty again and again. Perhaps Alexander thought that his men, unhappy with the way he was taking on Persian customs and keen to go home, might have turned to Parmenio as someone to lead them in overthrowing him.

Parmenio was still at Ecbatana. Alexander sent a messenger to him with a letter. While Parmenio was reading the letter, Alexander's messenger stabbed him to death. It was Macedonian custom to punish the family of a criminal.

That was how Alexander rewarded Parmenio for a lifetime of service.

Winter March

As the army continued to move east, news of uprisings came from areas they had just conquered. Alexander was forced to turn back and take care of the rebels before he could continue his journey east.

Alexander had now reached the furthest corner of the Persian Empire. It was wild, mountainous land. He was tracking down Bessus, who was somewhere in his homeland of Bactria, now wearing the upright hood of the King of Persia.

Bactria was on the other side of a vast desert that was too wide to march across. Alexander had to take his army in a big loop south to get around the desert and then find the shortest route across the mountain range called the Hindu Kush.

The highest peaks of this mountain range are more than 6000 metres (20 000 feet). It was early spring and still bitterly cold. It was a gruelling journey for the Macedonian soldiers. They had to wade through deep snow. They ran out of food and at one stage were forced to eat the mules that carried their baggage. Many suffered from frostbite and altitude sickness. Others were snow-blinded. Some were so exhausted they collapsed and froze to death where they fell.

Alexander was the only one who wasn't driven to despair by this bleak trek. He marched up and down the line of men, urging them on, supporting them when they stumbled, until finally they reached the more hospitable slopes of Bactria.

Punishment

As had happened on many other occasions, the sheer speed of the Macedonian army, even in such terrible conditions, was enough to make Alexander's enemies quake in fear. Many of the Bactrians who had been enlisted by Bessus to fight Alexander deserted.

The Macedonians now found themselves marching through a desert. Their problems became the exact opposite of the ones they had faced in the mountains. Now it was heat and thirst that they had to endure.

Bessus was a veteran of the Battle of Gaugamela. He had seen Alexander in action. He fled too. Just like Darius, Bessus was betrayed by his remaining officers. They turned on him and left him naked by the side of the road, chained to a post with a wooden yoke around his neck. As far as Alexander was concerned, Bessus was a traitor. He didn't feel the same respect for him as he had Darius. He had Bessus's ears and nose cut off and then sent him to Ecbatana to be executed.

Tyrannical

Alexander's close friends had always been free to speak

their minds to their king. Now Alexander didn't want to hear any complaints about the way he ruled. Most of his followers recognised that their king had changed. They were careful to say only flattering things to him. One evening, everyone (including Alexander) had drunk far too much wine. Cleitus, one of the cavalry commanders, told Alexander that his achievements weren't his alone—they belonged to the Macedonian army. He also recalled Philip's great deeds. Cleitus didn't forget to remind Alexander that it was he who had saved Alexander's life back in their first battle at the Granicus. Alexander was furious that Cleitus had dared to be critical of him. As the argument grew more and more heated, he grabbed a spear from one of his bodyguards and ran it through Cleitus's body. Cleitus died instantly. He had been a close friend, the brother of Alexander's childhood nurse. No one could be sure of their position anymore.

Barbarian Bride

If that wasn't enough to upset even his most loyal soldiers, Alexander then did something that was more offensive to his men. He married a barbarian. His bride's name was Roxane. It was Alexander's first marriage. She wasn't a Macedonian. She wasn't even Persian. She was a

Somewhere near Maracanda, Alexander decided a hunt would be a pleasant diversion. Local people had a wild game enclosure where they had bred animals for hunting for generations. Alexander and his men wiped them out in a single day, killing 4000 animals.

princess of one of the remote tribes of Sogdiana. The sources tell us that Alexander fell in love with this beautiful young woman. This may have been true. No doubt the Sogdians were impressed that he'd married a local girl, but if he had wanted a political marriage to please the people he had conquered, why hadn't he married Darius's widow or one of his daughters? Whatever his reason, the Macedonian soldiers didn't like this turn of events. To make matters worse, Alexander also recruited 30 000 young men from the lands he had conquered to undergo military training in the Macedonian style.

Paranoid

Things were falling apart badly. There was another plot to kill Alexander. This time it was the royal pages who were heard discussing how to assassinate their king. These young men were part of Alexander's inner circle. It was their job to look after Alexander's personal needs. It seemed there was no one he could trust. The pages involved with the plot were arrested.

At about this time another issue arose. Alexander had seen how the Persians on his staff always fell to their knees and bowed their heads to the ground whenever they were in his presence. He liked that. He decided that he would like the Macedonians to do the same thing—not all the time, perhaps, but definitely on special ceremonial occasions. After

all, wasn't that the sort of respect that a king, a conqueror and a son of god deserved? One evening he tried out the idea on his officers.

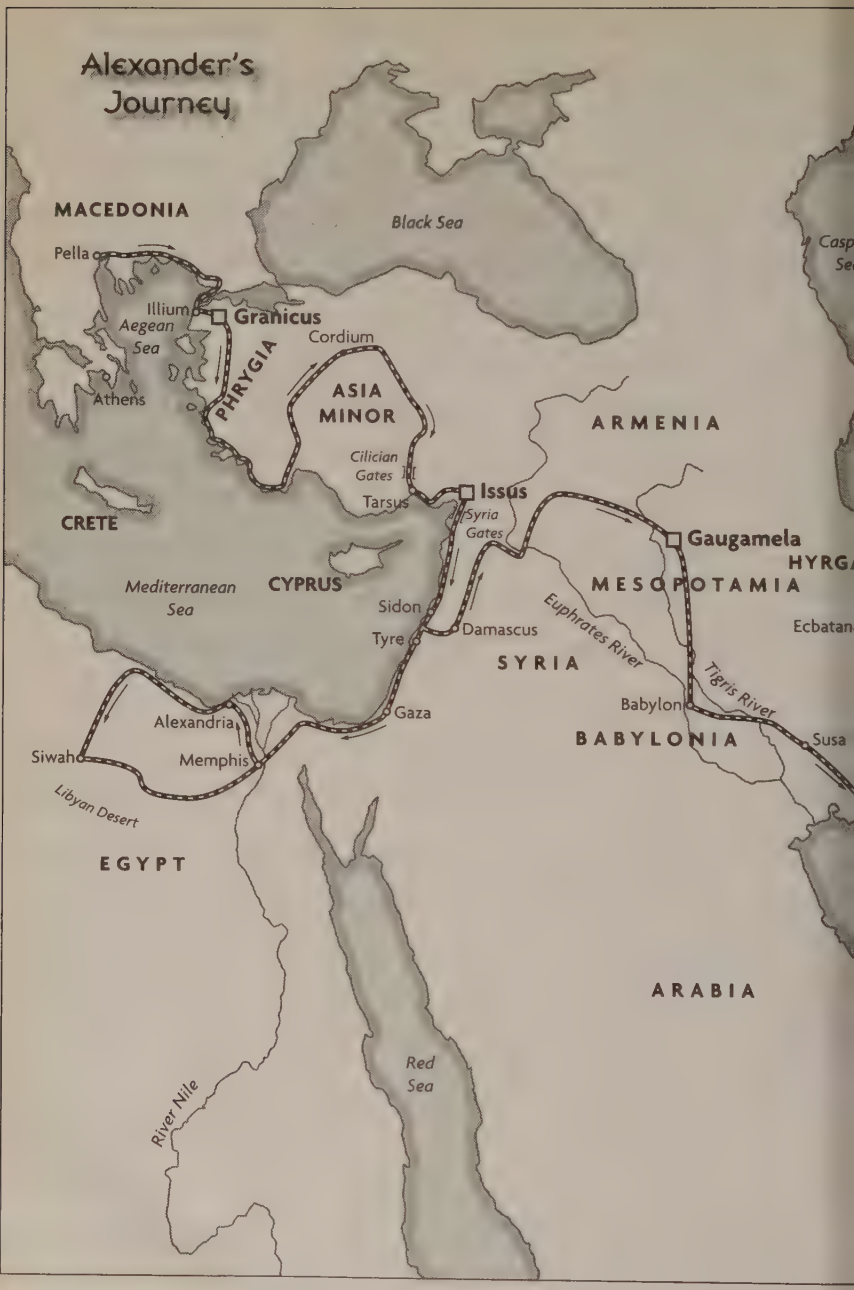
Macedonians had learned about equality (among noblemen at least) from the Greeks. They were used to treating Alexander with respect, but as an equal. They didn't like the fact that Alexander thought he was now above them. While some of them went along with this wish, one man, Callisthenes, refused. Callisthenes was Alexander's official historian. He was also a nephew of Aristotle. But no rank or relationship could be relied on as protection from Alexander's wrath any more. As it happened, Callisthenes was also the pages' tutor. Alexander decided that he had encouraged the pages' assassination plot. Callisthenes and the pages were all executed.

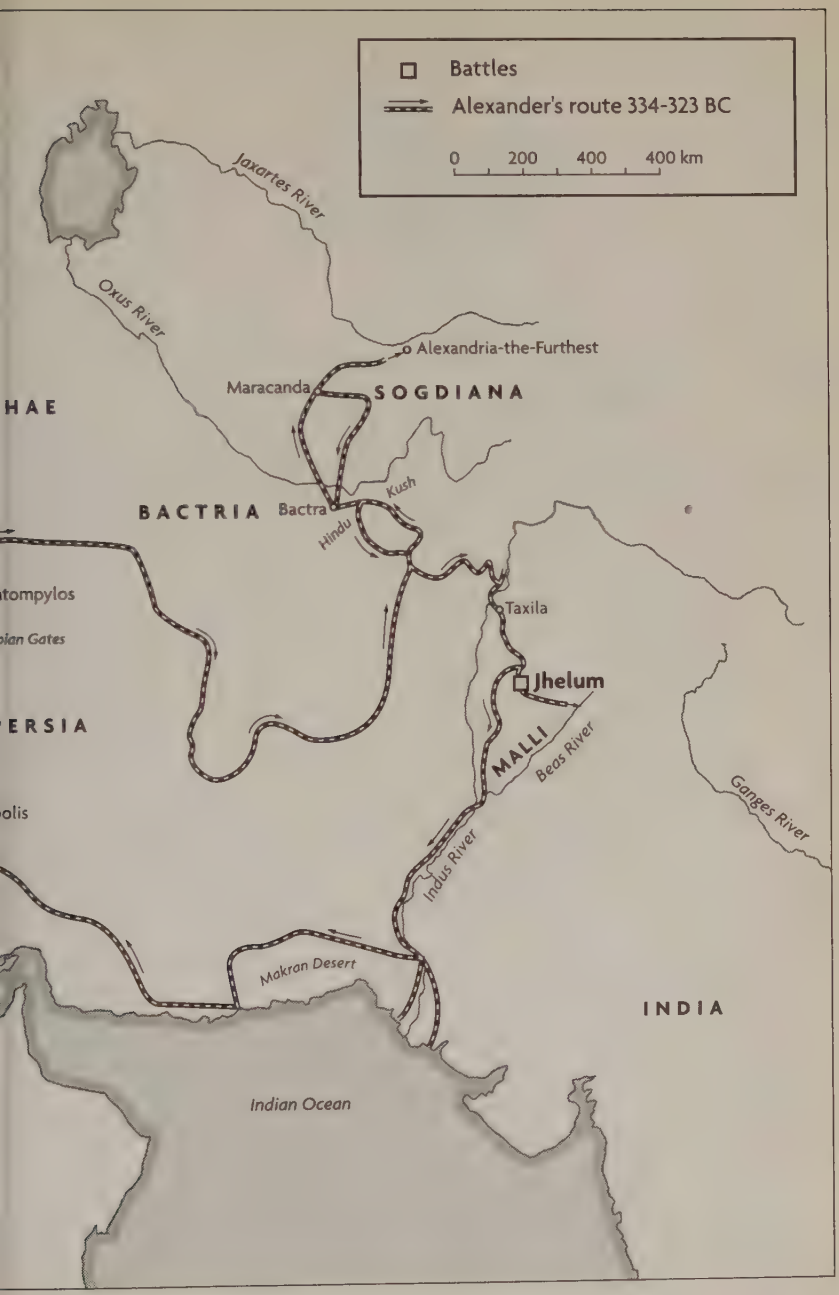
Alexandria-the-Furthest

Though Roxane's people were happy to accept Alexander, not all his new subjects were happy about being ruled by a foreigner. The people of the lands of Bactria and Sogdiana didn't like being ruled by Macedonians any more than they had liked being ruled by Persians. Alexander had to set up garrisons in the area so he could leave forces there to keep an eye on the local tribes and stop them from regaining their independence. He called all of these places Alexandria. The one on the banks of the Jaxartes River (which according to

Alexander's geography lessons was the north-east corner of the world) he called "Alexandria-Eschate", which means "Alexandria-the-Furthest".

It took Alexander two years to bring the tribes of that distant edge of the known world under control. Surely *now* he was ready to go home.


Alexander's Journey
MACEDONIA
Black Sea
Pella
Illium
Granicus
Aegean Sea
Cordium
PHRYGIA
ASIA MINOR
Athens
ARMENIA
Cilician Gates
Issus
Tarsus
Syria Gates
CRETE
Gaugamela
HYRGA
Mediterranean Sea
CYPRUS
MESOPOTAMIA
Sidon
Euphrates River
Ecbatan
Tyre
Damascus
SYRIA
Tigris River
Babylon
Alexandria
Gaza
BABYLONIA
Susa
Siwah
Memphis
Libyan Desert
EGYPT
ARABIA
Red Sea
River Nile


Battles
Alexander's route 334-323 BC
0 200 400 400 km
Jaxartes River
Oxus River
Alexandria-the-Furthest
Maracanda
SOGDIANA
HAE
BACTRIA
Bactra
Kush
Hindu
tompylos
olan Gates
ERSIA
olis
Taxila
Jhelum
MALLI
Beas River
Ganges River
Indus River
Makran Desert
INDIA
Indian Ocean

Chapter 9

What made Alexander so Great?

Hindu Kush Mountains, 327 BCE

There is often little amusement to be had in the evenings while we are on a march. Everyone but me seems ready to fall into their beds at the earliest possibility. I am regularly short of companionship late in the evening. Since the unfortunate incident with Callisthenes, it has become worse. It seems no one is willing to keep me company for fear I will run them through with a spear. I can usually rely on Hephaestion, of course. He will sit up with me as long as I wish.

Today we reached the edge of this mighty mountain range, a task much easier than last time we set foot on its heights. Then it

was winter. Now it is summer, though it's cool enough tonight. The track we were following reached its highest point and suddenly the mountain started to fall away and we could see what lay beyond the mountain's slopes.

Aristotle, my old tutor, had told me that I would be able to see the Ocean from there. I looked out over the sudden expanse. It was a fine view, but I couldn't see the Ocean. Instead a plain stretched out all the way to the horizon. I had known for some time that this would be the case. Persian scholars in Babylon had told me that the Ocean was beyond the River Indus. Some days ago I received a submission from an Indian rajah whose lands we are approaching. I asked him how far it was to the Ocean. He says it is nearly 2000 stades to a river known as the Ganges and from there we must travel its length until it reaches the sea. I hadn't told my men of these findings. They still believed that the edge of this mountain would be the edge of the world and after that the only place left for them to go would be home. I let them think that. They wouldn't have kept going otherwise.

One by one the first battalion of my men straggled up behind me, their eyes fixed on the ground as they wearily placed one foot in front of the other. Each man's face changed from weary concentration to dismay as he stared out over the landscape. "Where is the Ocean?" they cried.

Some said nothing. They just sank to their knees and wept.

Even I wasn't expecting that there would be quite so much land stretching out before us. But, the thought of it doesn't reduce me to

tears. I could barely stop a smile from spreading over my face. All the more land for me to conquer.

Tonight even Hephaestion nodded off, but I still felt that sleep was a long way from me.

I went to the door of my tent. "You and I can't be the only ones still awake," I said to the guard. "Find me someone with whom I can converse."

I was only half serious, but the man looked flustered and scurried off. He returned some minutes later with a man by the name of Anaxarchus of Abdera. I was pleased. He is one of my philosophers and the one who finally encouraged me to leave my tent when I was so distressed about poor Cleitus. He was right of course. A king's decision can never be wrong. I have been thinking of asking him to take over the role of official historian. I welcomed a chance to speak with him and learn more about his views.

"Of course it is right to bow down before you, my lord," he said after I had poured him a cup of wine. "All men will surely do this after you have joined your father in heaven. Why not do it now, while you are still here on earth?"

I like this man. He has a good mind.

"Macedonians worship Heracles, as they should. But was he not a man? Wasn't it his great deeds that made him divine? You, Sire, have not only achieved feats beyond any man, but you are also descended from the gods. Is that not enough to make you divine?"

"Not in the eyes of my men, it seems," I replied, refilling this noble man's cup with wine.

"They are fools. Heracles, great man though he was, was not a Macedonian. They should rejoice that they have a Macedonian to worship among the gods of the Greeks."

If only everyone had a mind as sharp as Anaxarchus.

We talked on into the night. Sometime before dawn, Anaxarchus told me a theory that he has been pondering. I am the only one that he has shared these thoughts with.

"I believe that there are other worlds besides our own," he whispered, though there was no one else to hear him. "New and different worlds beyond the reach of ordinary men. Who knows what wonders they might contain?"

"How can we reach these other worlds?" I asked, my head dizzy at the thought.

"Men have not yet discovered the means to find them, my lord," he replied.

I felt tears form in my eyes.

Anaxarchus jumped up and knelt at my side. "Have I offended you, Sire?"

"No, no. You haven't offended me, but I am filled with a great sadness. I have only one life on this earth and I still have so much of it to conquer. Now I find there are more worlds and I know that they are beyond my reach. I will never have the chance to even begin conquest of these lands."

The tears spilled down my cheeks.

Along his amazing journey, Alexander was faced by impossible challenges, not only from his enemies, but also

from the land and the weather. The harder the challenge the more he wanted to achieve it. The tougher the conditions, the more he wanted to go on. He fought in four major battles as well as many smaller skirmishes. He was never defeated. Occasionally, his enemy would get the better of him. That only encouraged him to fight back harder and to win.

It seemed like he would never have enough conquests. He just wanted to keep on going until he had conquered the entire world.

Lots of people have big dreams. Not everyone is able to achieve them. Alexander had a combination of qualities and skills that made him exceptional.

A Great Mind

The most important factor in Alexander's success was his brain. He was very clever. No matter how impossible the odds against him, Alexander always seemed to be able to come up with a plan. Nothing seemed to faze him. He could make decisions quickly. He was adaptable and innovative. Even when he was faced with an army many times the size of his, he always believed he could win. And he did. As far as he was concerned there was a solution to every problem. When wagons were hurtling down a hill towards him, he calmly ordered his men to make spaces to let them pass through. He used the same tactic with the Persian scythed chariots. If he didn't have enough ships to defeat the enemy's navy on the seas, he thought of a way to beat them from land.

Alexander had the knack of always being able to guess what his enemy's plans were, while they often didn't have a clue what he had in mind. This had a lot to do with his clever mind, but it was also a result of careful planning. He always sent scouts ahead. They worked out the best routes to take, they found good places to camp, they learned about local conditions, and they spied on the enemy.

In Alexander's day a horseman rode without saddle or stirrups. It took a lot of skill to stay on a horse and fight with a spear or a bow. The Chinese invented stirrups soon after Alexander's time, but it was nearly 1000 years before they reached Europe.

For Alexander, it seems, his campaign was like a giant game. He liked to take on an impossible challenge and work out a solution.

Speed

Alexander's disciplined army could march at unbelievable speeds. His whole army—tens of thousands of men—could cover up to 32 kilometres (20 miles) in a day. When Alexander took smaller fighting forces he achieved twice that speed. This doesn't sound very fast to us, but they were marching along dusty tracks through mountains and deserts carrying large packs.

When he was pursuing Darius with a small group of cavalry, they could gallop at a speed of 145 kilometres (90 miles) per day.

There were many occasions when his army's speed alone was enough to dismay and discourage his enemies so much that they surrendered or ran away.

The Macedonians were hard men. They performed some amazing feats of endurance. They crossed the Hindu Kush in spring when it was still freezing cold and covered with deep snow. They crossed burning, waterless deserts in Bactria and they did it again in an area called the Makran. Another thing Alexander had to deal with when he was in India was the monsoon season. Most activity stopped for the monsoon, but not Alexander. He and his army marched for 70 days in driving rain.

Sneaky

Some of Alexander's plans were just plain sneaky. Before

the Battle of Gaugamela, Alexander managed to spread a rumour through the Persian lines that he was going to make a surprise attack. This rumour was taken seriously by the Persian officers, who kept their men ready to attack all night so that they were tired during the actual battle.

Alexander used the tactic of creeping up behind the enemy on two occasions—once in Thessaly, when he was bringing his neighbours under control, and again at the Persian Gates. He left the usual number of campfires lit so that the enemy thought he and his army were still all in the same place. We will see him use a similar tactic during the Battle of Jhelum. In fact his preparation for that particular battle involved him continually playing tricks on his enemy. He even had someone dress in his clothes and pretend to be him while he was actually on his way to attack the Indians.

Think Big

Alexander's brilliant mind also thought up clever solutions to problems that involved astounding feats of engineering, like the causeway he built at Tyre and the steps cut up the side of a mountain so that his army could scale it.

The town of Gaza in Syria wouldn't surrender to Alexander, so he attacked it. The town was built on a hill 80 metres (260 feet) high and it was surrounded by walls. Alexander ordered siege engines to be built, but there were very few trees around to build them from. The few siege

engines that the engineers managed to put together had trouble staying upright in the soft sand that surrounded the city. Even when they did manage to get them to work, the missiles fell short of the high city walls.

Alexander ordered the engines from Tyre to be sent down by sea. Then he set his men the task of building a mound 55 metres (180 feet) high around the entire city. The engineers then set up the siege engines on top of the mound and bombarded the walls of Gaza with rocks. Meanwhile other troops dug tunnels under the walls. Finally attacked from all angles, the walls collapsed. The fate of the people of Gaza was the same as for anyone who resisted Alexander. The entire male population of Gaza was killed, while the women and children were sold into slavery.

No Mountain High Enough

On many occasions Alexander's enemies thought they would be safe if they climbed to the top of an impregnable mountain. They never were.

A band of Bactrians thought they would be safe if they retreated to a pinnacle of rock with treacherously steep sides. Alexander knew his men would be picked off one by one if they tried to climb it, so instead he ordered them to construct a causeway made of tree trunks, rocks and earth over the chasm between his position and the rock. The Macedonian construction got higher and higher until the defenders were

within arrow range. They panicked and surrendered.

In Sogdiana the locals tried the same ploy, climbing up to the heights of a rocky pinnacle they thought no one else could reach. They made the mistake of shouting down insults at Alexander, saying he'd need soldiers with wings if he was going to attack them.

Alexander asked his men which of them had experience in mountain climbing. Three hundred volunteers stepped forward. Under cover of darkness these men attempted the dangerous climb using rope made of linen, and tent pegs that they drove into the rock as footholds. Thirty of the men fell to their death, but in the morning Alexander pointed to his "winged soldiers", who were now standing above the defenders on the very peak of the mountain. The Sogdians surrendered.

> *When Alexander reached [Gaza], he ... ordered siege engines to be fitted together. The engineers, however, suggested that it was impracticable to take the city by force owing to the height of the mound. Alexander thought, on the contrary, that the more impracticable it was, the more necessary was the capture.*
>
> **Arrian,** *Anabasis of Alexander*

No River Wide Enough

Alexander was often faced with the problem of getting his men across a wide river that was too deep to wade across. Once he simply got his men to build a bridge. On two other occasions, once at the River Danube and again at the Indus in India, he didn't want his enemies to know that he was

crossing. He didn't have enough boats, so he ordered his men to fill their tent covers with straw. Using these homemade rafts his men floated silently across the rivers.

Twice Alexander needed ships for river journeys when his navy was hundreds of kilometres away on other rivers. He instructed his men to take the boats to pieces and then carry them across to the other rivers, where they were reassembled. Boats were sometimes built from scratch from surrounding forests. If there were no forests, that wasn't a problem either. The timber was transported by floating it downriver to where it was needed.

The Best Army

Alexander had the best army in the world. Though he didn't like to admit it, this was thanks to his father. Philip had taken an unruly rabble of men and turned them into a well-trained professional army. He had even invented the Macedonians' trademark weapon, the sarisa. Alexander had inherited this army. He couldn't have achieved what he did without them.

The Macedonian soldiers were tough men who could withstand hardship. They were also well-disciplined. They didn't turn and run when the going got tough. They trusted Alexander's judgement and they did whatever he ordered, even if it looked like it would lead to certain death.

Alexander picked the best fighters from among the people

that he conquered and added them to his army. Men with special skills such as the Thessalian cavalry and the Cretan archers became invaluable parts of his army.

On one occasion just the sight of the Macedonian army doing drills was enough to frighten the enemy. It was on the borders of Macedonia, while Alexander was getting his neighbours under control. The Macedonians were outnumbered by enemy fighters in surrounding hills and also dangerously low on supplies. The Macedonians didn't attack. Instead they assembled on a plain where everyone could see them and went through their weapons drills and precision marching in total silence. The infantry marched in perfectly straight lines. Their sarisas rose and fell in unison. When they had finished they suddenly shouted out their battle cry and beat their spears on their shields. Their enemy was at first awe-struck by the silent drills and then terrified by the sudden roar and clash of weapons. They ran for their lives.

Inspiration

On this long and difficult campaign, the Macedonians' discipline and enthusiasm would soon have waned if Alexander himself hadn't been there to lead them. He was an example to his men. He always led battles and skirmishes himself. Putting himself at risk, he was always in the thick of the battle. He was wounded more than 20 times, slashed by

swords, stuck with spears, beaten with a club. He ate what his men ate and, in the beginning at least, wore what they wore.

He had endurance beyond any of his soldiers. He could march or ride for longer than any of them, and he could survive on little sleep. His bravery at times made him reckless and there were times when he was nearly killed, like when he was at the Granicus and, during his Indian campaign, at the citadel of the Malli. But not even his strongest critics could ever accuse Alexander of being cowardly. Despite his youth he was admired and respected by his men. He was their king, their general, their hero.

Driving Force

All of Alexander's skills, his army's discipline and endurance, would have meant nothing if Alexander had not wanted to succeed. He had a yearning to set himself challenges, to try and outdo his heroes and his enemies. In the sources, the Greek word used to describe this need is "pothos". It means a longing to discover the unknown, a yearning to investigate the mysterious, a need to take up a challenge just because it's there.

It was this yearning that kept Alexander going, kept him wanting to go over the next mountain, to cross the next river, long after his men had had enough. It was pothos that took him on his side trips to Siwah and Troy. It was pothos that made him attempt to undo the Gordian Knot. After all

of Persia was conquered and his men were worn out, it was pothos that had him wondering what other lands he could conquer.

Pothos was Alexander's driving force. It had taken him to the edge of the known world. Where would it take him next?

Chapter 10

World's End

Banks of the Jhelum River, India, May 326 BCE

What a night! I've never seen such a storm. The rain poured from the dark skies as if the gods were emptying giant water jars on us. It was impossible to see more than a spear's length in front. Every few minutes the sky lit up as if it were day, then there was a deafening crack of thunder—Zeus beating his shield.

One of my officers came to me, hinting that we should put off this attack until the weather improves. I laughed at him.

"I couldn't have picked a better night!" I replied. "The Indians will never expect us to cross the river on a night like this."

He was a young man by the name of Nicanor. He had just taken up his first command. A group of new recruits were under him who had only recently arrived from Thrace. My veterans prepared

for the crossing without complaint about the weather. The new recruits, however, were uneasy. Some of their number, excited by the prospect of their first battle, had swum out to one of the islands in the river the afternoon before to get a closer look at the Indians. They were ambushed by a group of enemy soldiers who had seen them and had silently surrounded them. Only two of the young men had returned to tell the tale.

Their commander was shaken by this early loss. He tried to tell me that Zeus was angry with us, that we shouldn't test his wrath.

"Nonsense," I replied. "He's not angry with us. The Lord of Lightning and Thunderbolts is creating perfect weather for our purposes. The clatter of arms as we cross the river won't be heard over the din of the thunder!"

Craterus and his men have been creating a little subterfuge over the last few days. I had them pretend to prepare a crossing, marching up to the river's edge, shouting orders left and right. Then, just as the Indians were drawing up in battle formation on the other side, Craterus dismissed his men and they went back to their camps. It was great entertainment to watch the Indians' confusion. Porus, the Indian rajah, is, I'm sure, totally baffled. After three days of these tricks, the Indians no longer take any notice of our comings and goings.

Yesterday evening I decided the time was right to really cross. So that the enemy could not see our movements, we did so under cover of darkness. Some of the younger men lost heart when they heard the sound of elephants from the other side of the river. They

are fearsome beasts. Their trumpeting alone is enough to make men quail. It is loud enough to be heard from this side of the river, four stades or more away. The survivors of yesterday's adventure described how formidable Porus looks as he rides about on top of his elephant, towering above all around him. They swear he is seven feet tall and his armour is inlaid with gold and silver. He sounds like a worthy opponent.

The men were drenched to the skin, the leather of their armour soaked and heavy with the rain. No more than mine. The storm worsened. A bolt of lightning zigzagged across the sky and down to the earth. It hit a tree, which burst into flames.

"Zeus is warning you not to be faint-hearted," I shouted. "Once we are safe across the river the storm will stop, I promise you. It's just to cover our crossing, you'll see."

My veterans didn't need any encouragement. They plunged their boats and rafts into the raging river and rowed with all their might.

Nicanor hung back, his men clustered around him like chicks around a mother hen. He hadn't learned to obey orders without question, but there was no time to get angry with him.

The sky was more light than dark by this time, as the lightning flashes became so frequent they almost turned night into day. The sound of thunder was one continuous deafening rumble. Then there was a flash brighter than the others, followed immediately by a crack so loud I could hear nothing but ringing in my ears. I turned to see Nicanor's terrified eyes staring at me. His hair was

in flames. His skin was black and smoking. His tunic was burned away. The spear in his hand crumbled to ashes as I watched. I knew he must be screaming, but I could hear nothing but the ringing sound.

"This is how Zeus treats the faint-hearted," I cried as I pushed his terrified men into my boat, thrust oars in their hands and shoved the boat into the stream.

"Row!" I shouted, though I doubt they could hear me.

I took one of the rafts made of tent covers stuffed with straw. The leather was swollen and heavy but the seams had been sewn tightly. Though water washed over it, it kept afloat as I rowed into the current.

The current was ferocious. It took all my strength to propel the raft to the other side. One boat was caught by the current and capsized. The lightning lit up the wet faces of the young recruits. They were masks of fierce concentration. Knowing that they rowed for their lives gave them strength beyond the reserves of their weary bodies. I dragged my raft ashore.

Streaks of wan light on the horizon heralded the dawn. There would be no sun that day, but the thunder and lightning were lessening, like the memory of a bad dream that fades as the day grows brighter. The rain had stopped at last.

The storemaster had managed by some miracle to get supplies across. I ordered him to issue bread, olive oil and dried figs to everyone. The bread is a little damp, but the tastes of our homeland have revived the men. My veterans have taken the night in their

stride. It is nothing to what they have endured before. The newer recruits eat their bread with the hunger of men returning from the brink of death, savouring every bite. I have ordered a ration of wine to be issued to every man. Just a mouthful to wake the battle zeal within them. The young men are now commanded by a seasoned officer. This experience has done them good. They will trust my judgement from now on.

I poured an offering of wine to Zeus. No doubt Indian scouts will sight us soon enough, but we have crossed the river without being attacked. I thank Zeus for his aid.

Unfortunately for Alexander and his men, the daylight revealed that they'd made a mistake. They hadn't reached the opposite bank of the River Jhelum. They were on another island in the river. They had to wade up to their necks through another channel of water before they reached the river bank. By this time Porus's scouts were well aware of their crossing.

Into India

Alexander had marched his army across the Indus River into the kingdoms of India. These were well-governed lands, centres of knowledge ruled by Indian rajahs whose subjects had a high level of skill in arts and crafts. One of these rajahs, Taxiles, had already submitted to Alexander and offered his services to him. This rajah thought he could get Alexander to help him defeat his enemy, Porus.

Porus, however, had no intentions of submitting to Alexander.

Deception

It had been a long time since the Macedonians had faced an enemy in battle. They had had many minor confrontations, raids and skirmishes, and they had mostly been victorious.

When the dawn came, Indian scouts saw that Alexander and his men had crossed the river. They reported this news to Porus. But on the other side of the river, Craterus continued the subterfuge. A large detachment of men was busy preparing to cross the river. A man about the same size as Alexander and wearing his clothes was marching about giving orders.

Alexander's tactic of circling around the enemy and sneaking up unexpectedly on them was used by Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of the French, in the 1800s and more recently in the US-led Desert Storm campaign in Iraq.

Just as Alexander had hoped, Porus thought that

Craterus's men were the main attack force, and the men who had crossed the river were just a small unit. He sent his son with only 2000 cavalry and 120 chariots to face Alexander's army. Porus's son and his detachment were totally outnumbered. His chariots got bogged in the mud. Alexander and his men easily defeated them.

Porus, commanding the battle from his turret on top of an elephant, realised he had fallen for Alexander's trick. He drew up his own troops in battle formation. At the front of his army was a row of more than a hundred formidable elephants, which shielded the Indian infantry. On either side the infantry was protected by cavalry and chariots.

Elephant Battle

Alexander knew that he couldn't use his usual tactics for this battle. If the phalanx advanced into the path of the elephants they would be trampled by the great beasts. On the other hand he couldn't send his cavalry to attack the elephants either—the horses would be terrified by them. Instead of sending the phalanx to attack the centre, he led a cavalry charge from the right, attacking the Indian cavalry. Alexander had hidden another cavalry

...some of the elephants had been wounded, others were weary and had lost their drivers; and they no longer kept their separate formation in the battle but, as if maddened by suffering, attacked friends and foes alike and in all sorts of ways kept pushing, trampling, and destroying.

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander.*

Indian war elephant

unit, led by a general called Coenus, out of sight. Using the Macedonian infantry as a shield, they had snuck around to the other side of the battle and hid out of sight so that they could make a surprise attack from the rear. When they attacked, the Indian cavalry had no choice but to pull back behind the elephants.

Then the Macedonian phalanx advanced. They suffered heavy casualties and many were crushed by the elephants. They attacked the elephants by stabbing them in the eyes with sarisas and hacking off their trunks with swords and axes while the archers aimed for the elephant drivers. Chaos followed as riderless elephants trampled men from both sides. The Indian archers had trouble reloading their long bows in the slippery conditions. The Macedonians managed to surround the Indians and overwhelm them. When a gap appeared in the Macedonian line, the Indians made their escape. That was when Craterus crossed the river with the remaining Macedonian army to pursue the retreating Indians. It was a long and bloody battle. Eventually Porus was forced to surrender.

Death of an Old Friend

Many people died in the Battle of Jhelum. As usual the sources probably underestimated the number of Macedonian deaths. By this stage Alexander may well have been immune to the sight of thousands of dead bodies, but there was one

Alexander's Big Battles
Number 4—Jhelum

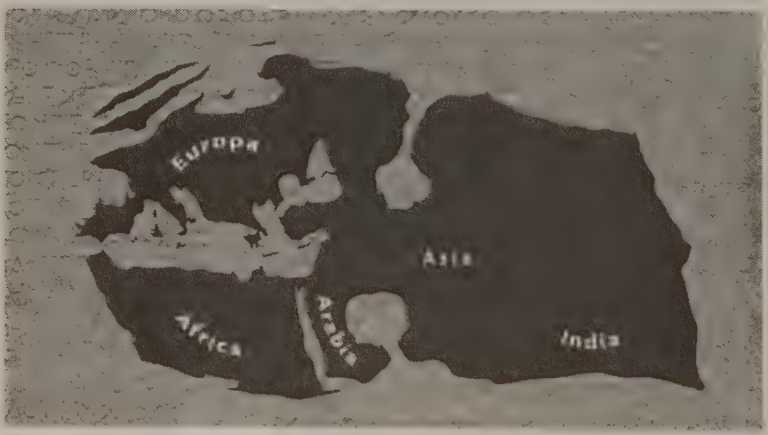
Macedonians		Indians
	Where?	
	East bank of the River Jhelum, India	
	When?	
	May 326 BCE	
	Who?	
Alexander	**leaders**	Porus
34 000	**infantry**	30 000
7000	**cavalry**	4000
sarisas swords	**weapons**	bamboo javelins bows and arrows swords 200 war elephants 300 war chariots
Alexander's military genius larger army	**strengths**	best position elephants to panic enemy horses
enemy watching battle preparations	**weaknesses**	outnumbered archers inconvenienced by the mud
310	**casualties**	23 000 Porus's two sons
	winner	
	Alexander	

death that would have been a great blow to Alexander. After almost 20 years of devoted service, Bucephalas died of exhaustion soon after this battle. The great horse had allowed no one but Alexander to ride him and would kneel to allow his master to mount. Alexander was very upset. He founded a garrison near the site of the battle and named it Bucephala after his faithful horse.

Off the Edge of the Map

After his men were rested, Alexander resumed his journey. He wanted to reach the Ocean. His plan seems to have been to make his way to the River Ganges and then follow it until it reached the Ocean.

Alexander's idea of what the world looked like was very different from the reality. He believed India was just a narrow strip of land. Its eastern coast was actually almost 2000



How Alexander saw the world

kilometres (1240 miles) away—and it wasn't the edge of the world. To get to the Pacific Ocean, Alexander would have had to travel almost as far again as he had already come from Macedonia. On the way he might have discovered China—if he had gone on.

Mutiny

It was more than four years since Alexander had told his men they only had a four-day march ahead of them. Altogether, the Macedonians had been campaigning for more than eight years.

It was the monsoon season. These weather conditions were completely unfamiliar to the Macedonians. They had to march through constant pouring rain. In the wet, humid conditions they were pestered by mosquitoes, their wounds wouldn't heal, their iron weapons rusted and their clothing grew mouldy. Indian tribes continued to try to stop their progress, so the fighting wasn't over either. Rumours spread among the disgruntled troops of the formidable armies that lay in wait for them. Alexander kept leading them on, telling them that soon they'd be able to see the Ocean. They crossed another river and another but there was still no sign of the Ocean. As they gazed across the third river they had come to since entering India and saw nothing but endless plain, the drenched Macedonian soldiers refused to go any further. Could Alexander win them over again?

Chapter 11

Homeward Bound

Beas River, India, 326 BCE

No king has ever been so mistreated by his subjects. No general has ever been so insulted by his men. Their ingratitude is unbelievable. I have never asked them to do anything that I would not do myself. I have always put myself in harm's way first. I could understand their reluctance if I had sat back and ordered them to act in my name. That has never been the case. And how am I rewarded for my fair treatment of every last man? Silence. I made a speech, telling them how much I honour them. I listed their achievements. I praised their deeds. All I asked was that they accompany me to the Ocean. Silence. I could have commanded it, but I am too reasonable for that. Too reasonable for my own good it seems.

Some fool has spread rumours that there are mighty warrior

nations ahead, each with 4000 war elephants. They are like children listening to scary stories at bedtime. They believe these lies. I don't, of course, but just the thought of such challenges inspires me to go on, to overcome whatever stands in my way.

Then Coenus had his say. He spoke for everyone, so he said. Snivelling on about how they all longed to go home to their families. Telling me I could come back with fresh troops, as if it were nothing more than a journey of a few days. How was his speech met? With weeping from some, with rousing cheers from the rest.

I sent them all away. I will not leave my tent until they come grovelling at my feet. A deputation was sent to try and win me around to their point of view. I drew my sword and threatened to run through the next man who defied me. They will give in to me eventually. Once they think about the long journey home they will quail. Who could command them? They will meet rebels and bandits along the way. They will never make it home without me. I will sit here, rest until they come crawling to me for forgiveness. I will re-read the Iliad *to see what inspiration I can draw from it.*

—

It is dark outside. I can see a triangle of the night sky through the flap of my tent. It is bright with stars too numerous to count. It is the first time I have seen clear sky for many a night. It has rained day after day for more than two months. It is the rain that finally sapped the will of my men.

No one has come near me. How can they do this to me?

What have I done to deserve such disloyalty? They are cowards, sluggards. I am their king. How dare they disobey my orders? I am more than their king, I am the descendent of Achilles, the heir of Heracles, son of Zeus. They should bow down to me.

I have come this far, to the very edge of the world and now they deny me the satisfaction of seeing the Ocean. It is my right. I have conquered the four corners of the known world. What little is left in the unknown realms should be mine as well. I can almost smell the brine of the eastern Ocean it is so close. But these small men, these spineless creatures, whine about their wounds and their weariness and their wish to go home. They are like children worn out by a long outing, self-absorbed by the fatigue of the moment, discomforted by a little rain, unable to value the experience they have gained, without care for the glory of Macedonia. Snivelling wretches.

I allowed them to plunder the lands and the homes of the people about here. They came back laden with treasures. I offered the married men free rations for their families. I proposed an allowance for every child. What more do they want?

One of my Companions enters with some food. I fling it outside in the dirt. I will not eat until they see the error of their ways.

—

The triangle of sky is grey now. Morning approaches. It is raining again. All I can hear is the scuffle of the wild creatures that feast on the food that lies spoiling outside my tent. And the relentless drip of rain. I have taken no food or drink for three days.

It seems after all my efforts on their behalf, they will stand by and watch me die for want of food rather than exert themselves any more.

I am permitted to go to the edge of the Persian Empire, but no further.

I will go on without them. I don't need them. I will make do with the horsemen from Dahae and Bactria. They are uncultured, but they fight well and are used to hardship. They will come with me.

It has come to this then. I must finish my quest, not with my countrymen, but with strangers. I will go and sacrifice to the river and see what the portents are for the crossing. The journey is in the hands of the gods.

Alexander made another one of his rousing speeches, but this time it had no effect. His men couldn't understand why he wanted to go on. They were now in unknown lands, beyond the eastern borders of the old Persian Empire. Officers and soldiers alike refused to go any further. Alexander sulked in his tent for three days, hoping to make them feel bad and change their minds. That didn't work either.

Alexander ordered his seers to make sacrifices at the river's edge. They examined the entrails to see what the omens were. They had the good sense to predict misfortune if they crossed the river. Alexander was able to call a halt without appearing to give way to his army. The army turned round and made its way back to the Jhelum.

If they thought they were just going to retrace their steps back to Macedonia, they were mistaken. Alexander had other plans. If he couldn't go to the eastern Ocean, he could at least see the Ocean to the south. He arranged for a fleet of ships to be constructed so that he could sail down the Jhelum until it flowed into the River Indus and then on to what is now known as the Indian Ocean.

Spectacle

What a different sight Alexander's army must have been to the one that left Macedonia eight years earlier. Troops from the conquered lands now outnumbered Macedonians. There were cavalry units from Bactria and Sogdiana, horse archers from Dahae and Indians from Taxila. There were baggage animals loaded with food and tents, wagons piled with plunder. Many soldiers had taken wives along the way, so there were thousands of women and children. As well as the cavalry horses, there were camels and the elephants that had survived the battle. Perhaps he still had the lions and leopards in cages. It must have looked like a gigantic travelling circus.

The army certainly caused a stir among the Indian tribes as it travelled south. They heard the thwack of many oars on the water and the chanting of the oarsmen to help them keep their rhythm. The local people came out to stare in wonder as the massive army of foreigners passed. There were 800 ships. Alexander travelled on one of the ships, as did the cream of the Companion cavalry, the archers, Agrianians and the Hypaspists. Other ships carried the cavalry horses and supplies. Craterus with the rest of the cavalry and some of the infantry marched down one side of the river. On the other side, Hephaestion led the remainder of the infantry and 200 elephants.

Reckless

Once the local people caught sight of this formidable army, most of them submitted before an arrow had been fired. There were still some Indian tribes, however, who were willing to fight for their freedom. One such tribe was called the Malli. Alexander's scouts informed him of their planned resistance. Alexander attacked them, taking them by surprise and slaughtering them. Those who escaped were hunted down, but a few took refuge in a walled city. Even inside the walls they were driven back to the citadel in the centre of the city.

But the Macedonians had lost their old enthusiasm for war. They had thought the fighting was over. The engagement with the Malli had already lasted longer than they'd expected. When Alexander called for the scaling ladders to be brought up to the citadel walls, no one rushed forward to climb them. Alexander was furious. He leapt onto one of the ladders himself and climbed to the top. He stood alone on the battlements, fending off a shower of rocks and arrows.

His men now felt ashamed of their reluctance. They rushed forward to climb the ladders and go to Alexander's aid. But so many men swarmed up that the ladders broke. Only a few Companions made it to the battlements. They watched in horror as Alexander leapt down inside the citadel.

Belated Attack

Alexander was one against many. The hail of spears and arrows pierced his shield and drove him to his knees. Two of his attackers ran forward to spear him, but he managed to fight them off. Finally one of the Indians' arrows, measuring one metre (three feet), pierced his leather armour. Blood spurted from the king's chest. The Companions on the wall leapt down to aid Alexander. One of them was Peucestas, the man who had carried the shield of Achilles from Troy. He held the shield over Alexander while he himself was showered with arrows.

Outside, the Macedonians were convinced that their king was dead. In a frenzy they started scaling the wall however they could—standing on each others shoulders, hammering pegs in the walls to climb up. Some managed to scramble over the wall and open a gate. The Macedonian soldiers poured in and in a fury they killed every Mallian.

Bleeding

The arrow that had wounded Alexander had a barbed head, so it couldn't be pulled out without causing more damage. The arrowhead had to be cut out. Alexander's lung had been pierced. He had lost a lot of blood, but he survived. His men were terrified that he would die. They couldn't imagine anyone else leading them. They believed their lives depended on Alexander being their commander. Who else could outwit

the barbarians? Who else could get them home safely? Alexander couldn't walk. He had to lie on a couch on the deck of one of the boats to reassure his men that he was still alive. His reckless behaviour had nearly cost him his life, but it had also revived his army's flagging loyalty.

As they continued down the Indus they met further resistance. Alexander was still too weak to fight himself, but his army fought off all attackers in a slow and difficult journey to the mouth of the Indus. The journey took five months. They had met more resistance in India than they had in Persia, but eventually all attackers were forced into submission.

More Pothos

Alexander's army might have forced him to turn for home, but Alexander had no intention of taking the easy way. When they reached the Indian Ocean he devised a plan to explore the coast. This was no ordinary stretch of coastline. It was a barren strip of land where the desert met the sea. It was known as Makran. Perhaps Alexander wanted to punish his men for stopping him from going to the edge of the world. Or perhaps he was trying to outdo someone again.

A legendary Persian queen called Semiramis was believed to be the person who had built Babylon 500 years earlier. After conquering India she had returned to Babylon along this same desolate coast. It was a disastrous journey. Legend

says that only 20 men out of her whole army survived the journey. Alexander wanted to do better.

Death in the Desert

The journey through Makran was not much better for the Macedonians. The army suffered from lack of food and water while marching in scorching heat. The wagons got bogged in the sand and had to be left behind. The baggage animals also found it hard going. The soldiers were forced to eat them. There was no firewood to be found anywhere, so they had to eat the mule flesh raw. Their guides lost their way and then when rain came to quench their thirst, it was torrential. Many were drowned in flash floods.

> *And some were left behind on the roads from sickness, others from weariness or heat or inability to hold out against thirst... Sleep too overpowered men on the roads, since it was by night that they generally made their stages. In that case, on waking, if they still had the strength they would follow in the tracks of the army, but few out of many were saved: most of them were lost in the sand, like men who fall overboard at sea.*
>
> Journey through the Makran Desert, **Arrian,** *Anabasis of Alexander*

Alexander did his best to encourage his army on the terrible journey. He ate and drank only as much as his men did and he travelled on foot all the way. It didn't make much difference. The journey took two months and was a disaster from beginning to end. Thousands of people (women and children as well as soldiers) died on the journey just to satisfy Alexander's pothos. Finally the army found its

way out of the desert and into the heart of Persia.

Nearchus didn't do much better sailing along the coast with the navy. He and his men also suffered from lack of food and water. They had their own adventures, discovering a tribe of hairy stone-age people along the coast who ate nothing but raw fish. The admiral's men were forced to eat palm hearts and wild camels.

Heart-of-palm is the newly grown part of the trunk of a palm tree. The soft white stem is nutritious but dangerous if too much is eaten.

Robbers and Rebels

Alexander was a great general. Few people would argue with that, but he wasn't much good at looking after his empire. While he'd been busy making heroic journeys his empire was not running smoothly at all. The Indians had started to rebel against their new leaders before Alexander even got to the mouth of the Indus. The wild lands of Bactria and Sogdiana also revolted. It wasn't only the barbarians who were giving him trouble. A number of satraps were running things their own way and helping themselves to the money meant to govern their lands. Others were accused of being cruel to their subjects and destroying temples. Alexander had to bring the rebel satraps into line.

There wasn't much he could do about India, but he could make an example of the Persian satraps who were governing badly. Alexander executed a number of them, including

some Greeks and Macedonians. Perhaps the most serious disloyalty was from Alexander's lifetime friend, Harpalus. He had been left in charge of Babylon, but when Alexander reached the city he found that Harpalus had fled with 5000 talents from the Babylonian treasury.

Going Native

When Alexander had married Roxane, her father became a loyal follower who fought alongside his new son-in-law. Alexander decided that this strategy would work for Persia as well. When he arrived in Susa he announced he had decided to marry again. He took not one, but two Persian wives. One of them was Darius's eldest daughter, Stateira. He also commanded that his officers follow his example and marry Persian noblewomen. More than 90 marriages took place in one huge ceremony. He gave each couple a generous amount of money and even gave a reward to all the ordinary soldiers who had taken Persian de facto wives.

The mass marriages took place in a tent that was 800 metres (half a mile) in circumference. It was supported, not by tent poles, but by columns that were nine metres (29.5 feet) high. The columns were gilded and covered with precious jewels. There were carpets and hangings embroidered with gold, and a gold couch for each couple.

He introduced some Persian soldiers into the Companion Cavalry. Once again, while trying to impress the Persian people, he managed to offend the Macedonians. They thought it was degrading to marry the conquered women,

and they didn't like Persians joining what had been an exclusively Macedonian club.

At the same time the 30 000 Persian men who Alexander had ordered to be trained like Macedonian soldiers arrived in Susa. They were young and keen to show off their new skills. Alexander was impressed by their military discipline. He called them his Successors. The battle-scarred Macedonians who had been dragged through deserts and over mountains were less impressed. They felt threatened by these young upstarts and called the Persian troops the "War-dancers".

Bad Omens

As Alexander approached Babylon, some Persian seers came out to meet him. They said they had received a message from their god Marduk that misfortune would befall Alexander if he entered the city at that particular time. They pleaded with him not to enter. Being a superstitious man, Alexander hesitated. The seers begged him to at least not enter from the west. Alexander agreed and made his way round to the east of the city. But there were marshes to the east of the city, and Alexander couldn't find a path through them. He had no choice but to enter from the west.

Soon after this there was the incident with Alexander's hat blowing off into the river and the soldier who retrieved it putting it on his head. There was another incident where a prisoner managed to break away from his guards and sit on

Alexander's throne. Both of these incidents were seen as bad omens for the king.

Back to Babylon

Babylon was the capital of Alexander's empire. He doesn't seem to have had any plans to go back to Macedonia. He didn't mention any longing to see his homeland, his mother or his sisters. There were still problems with revolts in Persia, and the Greek city-states were in conflict again, but organising the government bored Alexander. Instead of making his existing empire more stable, after a few weeks rest he started planning his next expedition. He wanted to add Africa to his empire, but before that he wanted to conquer Arabia. He knew that these were rich lands where spices grew in abundance. Trade in these spices would bring added wealth to his empire. Alexander wouldn't be happy until he'd conquered the entire world.

He ordered a new fleet to be built. He had grand plans. He wanted no fewer than 1000 ships. He also started to build a bigger harbour at Babylon where his navy could anchor before sailing down the Euphrates River to the Persian Gulf.

The End

The date for departure on the next expedition was set for early June. Forty-seven ships were ready—nowhere near his dream of 1000 ships, but enough for his Arabian venture.

Late in May, Alexander made sacrifices to the gods for a successful journey. He organised a feast to honour his old friend Nearchus, who he had again appointed admiral of the fleet. He left the feast intending to go to bed, but one of his officers invited him to a smaller party. He stayed at this party, drinking till the early hours.

When he left he felt a fever coming on. He performed his duties the next day, but was soon so ill he had to go to bed. He fell into a coma and died.

The cause of his death has been debated for more than 2000 years. The early historians were convinced that he had been poisoned and blamed Antipater for it. Over the years there have been many theories. Did he die of alcohol poisoning? Had he contracted malaria? Was it the effects of his last wound? We will never know.

Burial

Mystery surrounds Alexander's burial as well. The sources of the time mention briefly that his body was taken to Alexandria in Egypt. Other later writers continued the tale. They describe the fabulous golden tomb that was on public display for centuries and which was visited by famous people such as Julius Caesar. Eventually the gold from the tomb was melted down to make coins and Alexander's body was placed in a glass tomb. Around 400 years after his death, the tomb disappeared from the records. It has never been found.

There are those who think that Alexander wasn't buried at Alexandria at all. Some believe he was buried in the royal tombs in Macedonia. Others believe that it was his wish to be buried at Siwah.

Aftermath

Alexander had never been interested in governing his empire. The systems of government that he set up were very shaky. His empire didn't last long. As he was dying, those around him asked who he wanted to take his place as king. He replied, "The strongest." He handed his ring with the seal of Macedonia to his friend Perdiccas. Alexander's first wife, Roxane, gave birth to a son a few months after he died, but it would be years before he would be old enough to take over government. The inevitable happened. There was fighting between rivals for the empire, and it was carved up among rivals. The fighting continued for 40 years. Perdiccas was murdered. Cassander (one of Antipater's sons) became regent, imprisoning Alexander's intellectually impaired brother, and Alexander's infant son. Cassander eventually killed Roxane and her son.

Ptolemy transported Alexander's body all the way to Egypt for burial in Alexandria. He took over the government of Egypt, eventually calling himself pharaoh. His descendants ruled Egypt for 200 years. Cassander became king of Macedonia and most of Greece. Other Macedonian generals took over the rule of Persia and other parts of the empire. The people of the Indian kingdoms were left to take care of their own government again. No one was interested in taking up Alexander's plans for further world conquest.

A great-great grandson of Ptolemy married Cleopatra, the famous Queen of Egypt.

Fairytale Hero

At the same time as people were writing the first histories of Alexander, storytellers were turning his life story into a fantastic legend told around fires at night. They exaggerated Alexander's adventures, making him even more of a hero. These stories are known as the Alexander Romance.

The story changed as it was retold in different countries, in different languages. Local myths and folktales got mixed in with Alexander's story. The story continued to be told and retold over the centuries. The character of Alexander changed so that he became a local hero wherever the story was told. European writers in the Middle Ages said that Alexander was a chivalrous knight and a Christian—even though he died more than 300 years before the birth of Christ. The

Egyptians made him an incarnation of one of their gods, son of Nechtanebo (the last Egyptian pharaoh) and Olympias. Even the Persians, the people he defeated, claimed that he was part Persian. In their version of the story Alexander is a half-brother of Darius. Darius's father defeated Philip of Macedonia and demanded his daughter in marriage. He sent the daughter back to Macedonia because she had bad breath and Alexander was born. This story makes Alexander a legitimate heir to the thrones of Macedonia and Persia. In an Indian version of the story, Alexander meets the Buddha.

Some people believe Alexander even found his way into the Bible and the Qur'an. It is believed that Alexander is the two-horned beast with iron teeth referred to in the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. In the Qur'an he is believed to be "Dhul-Qarnain", which means Two-Horned One.

Where the real Alexander was forced to turn back from his journeys, the fantastic Alexander continued on to the ends of the world and beyond. He fought dragons, came across talking trees and found a valley full of diamonds. Giant birds carried his ships to safety. He even travelled to the bottom of the sea in a glass cage.

Versions of the Alexander Romance were written down in many different languages including Greek, Latin, Armenian, Persian, Hebrew, Turkish, Spanish, French and German. He was known as "Sikander" by the Indians, as "Iskandar" by the Persians, and "Arksandres" in Egypt.

One-sided Story

All the historical information we have about the life of Alexander is written by Greeks. No history of his journey tells us the Persians' side of the story. In Alexander's time the religion of Persia was Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrians worshipped the god Ahura Mazda. The sources mention Alexander making sacrifices to the Egyptian god Ammon and to the Babylonian god Marduk, but there is no record of Alexander showing such respect to the gods of Persia. Instead he destroyed their temples.

The Zoroastrians called Alexander the Two-Horned One. Ancient coins show him wearing a headdress with the ram's horns of Zeus. When the Persians saw these coins they thought the horns meant that Alexander was the devil. They believe that his army killed priests and destroyed their temples and their scriptures, which were written on calfskin in gold ink. Alexander was also called "the Accursed One" by Persians. He conquered their country, destroyed their king and killed tens of thousands of Persians in battles and attacks on cities. As he swept through Persia he demanded that local people feed his troops. He took crops from the fields as well as stores of grain, often leaving starvation in his wake.

High Price

Alexander's adventures came at a great cost. He left a trail

of burial mounds behind him. Hundreds of thousands of people died because of his longing for conquest. Persians, soldiers and civilians, died on the pretext of a wish to revenge a 150-year-old crime.

The inhabitants of north-west India did no harm to Greece or Macedonia. They were quietly minding their own business when Alexander invaded their country, slaughtering thousands of people who tried to defend their homes.

Around 100 000 Macedonians took part in Alexander's expedition. Many of them died and many more were forced to settle in foreign lands far from home. Only the old and the wounded ever made it home again. The number of young men in Macedonia must have been greatly reduced. There would have been a shortage of husbands for young women for some time to come, resulting in a fall in the population.

Legacy

Alexander was only 32 when he died. In his short life he had built the biggest empire ever known. He conquered a large part of the known world. He defeated all his adversaries.

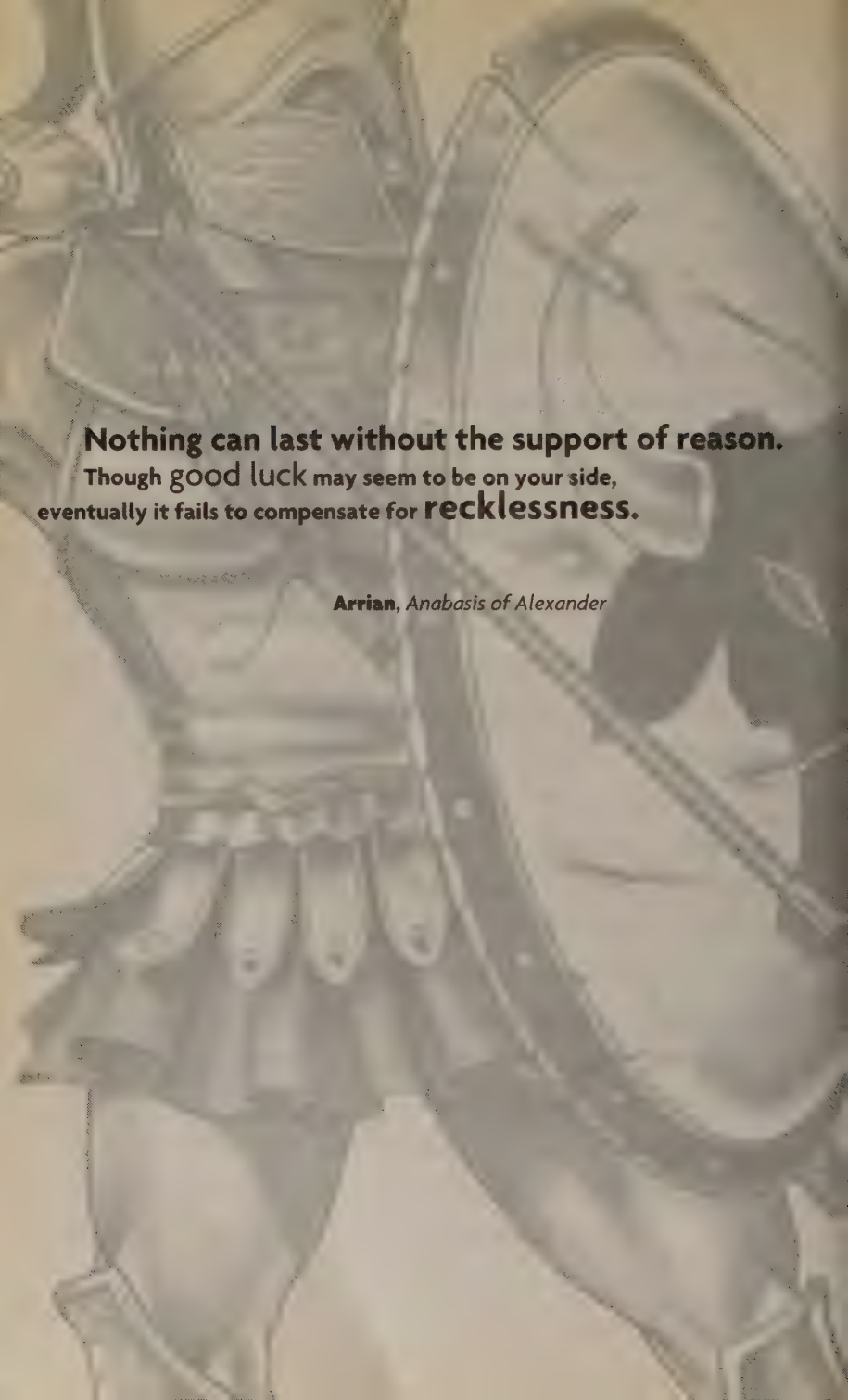
His epic journey with tens of thousands of soldiers has never been repeated. He travelled 40 000 kilometres. The journey took 11 years. It was an amazing feat. After his death he immediately went down in history as one of the most brilliant generals ever. Two thousand years later that title remains—there has been no one to match him.

But Alexander built his empire with violence. He conquered people with fear. His empire was short-lived. There are few traces of Alexander in the world today. There are no great monuments to him. He built military garrisons rather than palaces. He built no temples—in fact he destroyed them. He promised to rebuild the temple to Marduk in Babylon, but he never got around to it. He had grand plans for Alexandria in Egypt, but he left before they got underway. It was his friend Ptolemy who made the city that bears Alexander's name a centre for trade and knowledge.

He sought what no man ever sought before,
And wide-spread fame is left him but no more,
Yet fame is good for fame will not decay
Like some old dwelling weather-worn away.

The Shahnama of Firdausi, **an Iranian poem written about 1000 CE**

Perhaps it is wrong to judge Alexander by today's standards. Though we may not approve of such aggression today, in his own time conquering countries was considered an admirable thing to do. Alexander is an inspiration to many who want to achieve great things. But his story is also a lesson in the dangers of becoming too focused on winning at any cost.



Nothing can last without the support of reason.
Though good luck may seem to be on your side,
eventually it fails to compensate for recklessness.

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*

Timeline

Date BCE	event
356	Alexander's birth
343	Aristotle becomes Alexander's tutor
340	Alexander becomes regent
339	Alexander joins Philip on campaign
338	Battle of Chaeronea
337	Philip marries Cleopatra
336	Darius becomes King of Persia
	Philip murdered
	Alexander becomes King of Macedonia
335	Cleopatra and Europa murdered
	Alexander's Greek campaign
334	Persian campaign begins
	Battle of Granicus
333	Battle of Issus
332	Siege of Tyre
	Alexander crowned Pharaoh of Egypt
331	Alexander visits Oracle at Siwah
	Battle of Gaugamela
330	Burning of Persepolis
	Darius murdered
	Parmenio murdered
329	Crossing the Hindu Kush
328	Alexander murders Cleitus
327	Alexander marries Roxane
	Pages conspiracy, Callisthenes killed
326	Battle of Jhelum
	Alexander's army mutinies
325	Alexander wounded by the Malli
	Makran desert journey
324	Mass marriages in Susa
323	Alexander's death

List of Characters

Achilles
Legendary Greek warrior who fought in the Trojan war. A hero of Alexander the Great.

Ammon
An Egyptian god. Ancient Greeks thought he was the same god as Zeus.

Amyntas (1)
Alexander's grandfather whose wife tried to kill him.

Amyntas (2)
Alexander's cousin who also had a claim to the throne of Macedonia.

Antipater
A general who served under Alexander's father, Philip. He was the regent who looked after the affairs of Macedonia in Alexander's absence.

Aristander
A seer or soothsayer who predicted the future for Alexander.

Aristotle
A famous Greek philosopher and scientist who was Alexander's teacher when he was a boy.

Arrian
A Greek historian whose full name was Flavius Arrianus Xenophon and lived in the 2nd Century CE. He wrote a biography of Alexander which is one of the sources.

Athene
Ancient Greek goddess of war who was born out of the head of Zeus. She favoured the Greeks in the Trojan War.

Attalas
Uncle of Philip's wife Cleopatra. He insulted Alexander by saying he wasn't the true heir to the throne of Macedonia.

Bessus
A Bactrian chief who fought on the side of Darius at the Battle of Gaugamela. After Darius's defeat, Bessus murdered the Persian king and tried to take his place. Alexander had him executed.

Bucephalas
Alexander's horse which he rode for nearly 20 years.

Callisthenes
A nephew of Aristotle. He travelled with Alexander as his official historian. He started off as a good friend, but Alexander eventually had him executed because he thought he was plotting against him.

Cassander
Antipater's son. After Alexander's death he became the regent of Macedonia. He killed Alexander's wife and son, and became King of Macedonia and most of Greece.

Cleitus
One of Alexander's cavalry commanders. He saved Alexander's life at the Battle of Granicus. Alexander murdered him after a drunken argument at Maracanda.

Cleopatra (1)
Alexander's sister. She was forced into a marriage with her uncle for political reasons.

Cleopatra (2)
Philip's last wife. After Philip's death, Cleopatra was killed to prevent her claiming the throne for her son. Historians disagree as to whether Alexander ordered her death. Some believe she committed suicide.

Cleopatra (3)
Queen of Egypt (51–30 BCE). Famous for being the mistress of Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony. She was a descendant of Alexander's friend Ptolemy.

Coenus
A commander of Alexander's army. He played an important part in the Battle of Jhelum.

Craterus
One of Alexander's most important generals.

Darius
Darius III, King of Persia (336–330 BCE). Thoroughly defeated by Alexander, he was betrayed by some of his own generals, stabbed and left to die.

Diodorus
Full name Diodorus Siculus, he was a Greek historian of the 1st Century BCE. He wrote a history of the world that included the exploits of Alexander. It is one of the sources.

Erigyius
A friend of Alexander's from childhood, Erigyius was a commander in Alexander's army as well as a counsellor.

Europa
Daughter of King Philip and his wife Cleopatra. Not all the sources mention her, so some historians don't think she existed.

Firdausi
A Persian poet who lived around 1000 CE. His most famous work was the *Shanamah*, a chronicle of the history of Persia.

Harpalus
Close friend of Alexander. Alexander appointed him his treasurer (the man who looked after all his money). Harpalus used some of the money for himself and set himself up as a leader in his own right. He fled to Greece when he heard that Alexander was coming back from India.

Hephaestion
Alexander's closest friend and, some say, his lover. Alexander made him a general, and eventually his second-in-command, though some historians believe he didn't have a good military mind. When he died, Alexander was heartbroken.

Heracles
Hero in Greek mythology known for his amazing strength and courage. Alexander believed that Heracles was one of his ancestors. We usually call him by his Roman name, Hercules.

Homer
Ancient Greek poet who lived during the 9th Century BCE. He is believed to have written the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Leonnatus
One of Alexander's bodyguards. He was also a relative of Alexander.

Lysippos
The only sculptor who Alexander would allow to make statues of him. Though none of his statues have survived, some copies have.

Marduk
The chief god of the people of Babylon.

Mazaeus
A Persian general who took part in the Battle of Gaugamela. He later surrendered Babylon to Alexander, and Alexander made him governor.

Melqart
God of the people of Tyre.

Memnon
A Greek mercenary who fought on the side of the Persians. He was a very capable general who was about to attack Greece when he died.

Mithridates
A Persian general who wounded Alexander in the Battle of Granicus. He was the husband of one of King Darius's daughters.

Nearchus
Childhood friend of Alexander who became the admiral of his fleet.

Olympias
Wife of Philip II of Macedonia, mother of Alexander and Cleopatra (1), Olympias was the daughter of the King of Epirus, one of the areas bordering Macedonia.

Onesicritus
One of the chief helmsmen of Alexander's navy.

Parmenio
A key Macedonian general who served in the armies of Philip and Alexander until an old age. Alexander had him executed because he thought he was involved in a plot to murder him.

Perdiccas
A trusted friend and one of Alexander's military commanders. When he was dying, Alexander handed his ring to Perdiccas.

Peucestas
One of Alexander's bodyguards. He carried the shield of Achilles for Alexander into battles. He saved Alexander's life in the fight for the citadel of the Malli.

Philip
Philip II, King of Macedonia (383–336 BCE), he was Alexander's father. He was murdered by one of his own bodyguards.

Philip the Acarnanian
Alexander's personal doctor for most of his life. Parmenio accused him of trying to poison Alexander, but Alexander trusted him.

Philotas
Parmenio's son and commander of the Companion Cavalry. Accused of being involved in a plot to murder Alexander, he was executed.

Plutarch
Greek philosopher and writer (46–120 CE). He wrote biographies of many famous people including Julius Caesar. His biography of Alexander is one of the sources.

Porus
An Indian rajah who fought against Alexander in the Battle of Jhelum. After he was defeated, he became one of Alexander's allies, and continued to rule his kingdom.

Ptolemy
One of Alexander's generals and a friend from childhood. Ptolemy escorted Alexander's body to Egypt for burial, and later became Pharaoh of Egypt.

Quintus Curtius Rufus
Referred to as Curtius, he was a Roman writer who wrote a history of Alexander between 40 and 50 CE which is one of the sources.

Roxane
Daughter of a Sogdian chief who became Alexander's first wife.

Semiramis
Queen of Assyria who reigned 500 years before Alexander's time. She is believed to be responsible for building the city of Babylon.

Spithridates
A Persian general who fought at the Battle of Gaugamela and wounded Alexander.

Stateira
One of Darius's daughters who was captured after the Battle of Issus. With her mother and sister, she was kept as a hostage for a number of years. Alexander married her at the "mass marriages" in Susa.

Taxiles
An Indian rajah who submitted to Alexander. An enemy of Porus.

Zeus
Supreme god of the ancient Greeks. Alexander came to believe that he was the son of Zeus.

Acknowledgments

People have been writing about Alexander the Great for more than 2000 years. They started when he was still alive and modern authors (like me) are still writing about him today. A number of men who accompanied Alexander on his amazing journey wrote books about their experiences. There was Nearchus, who was in charge of the navy; Onesicritus, a helmsmen; Ptolemy, an officer in the army and a good friend of Alexander's; and Callisthenes, Alexander's official historian. Unfortunately, over the centuries all of these books have been lost or destroyed. Just a few fragments remain, quoted in other books.

The earliest writings about Alexander that have survived were written around 300 years after his death by Roman writers. These writers used the earlier books as a reference and quoted from them. Alexander historians usually refer to these writings as "the sources". I have used the works of Arrian, Quintus Curtius and Plutarch as my references.

Though the main facts are the same, some of the detail in the books by the Roman authors is different. That is one of the reasons why people are still writing about Alexander. As they search through the earliest writings, they try to work out what is the truth and what is myth.

There are many different points of view. I read lots of modern books about Alexander, but my main references were:

Conquest and Empire by A B Bosworth
Alexander of Macedon by Peter Green
Alexander the Great by J R Hamilton

Where these writers disagree, I have compared their arguments, checked with the sources ... and written my own version of Alexander's story.

Without the dedicated research of these historians I couldn't have written this book. I'd especially like to thank Professor Bosworth who was kind enough to answer my questions.

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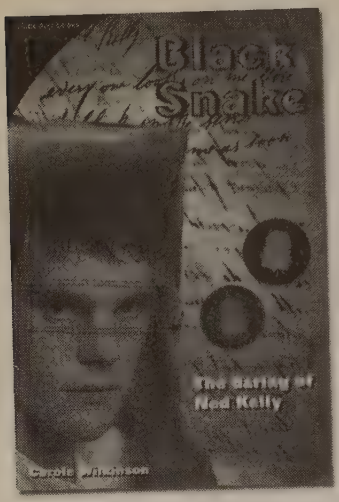

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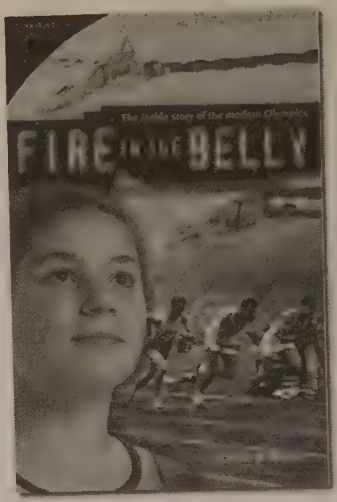

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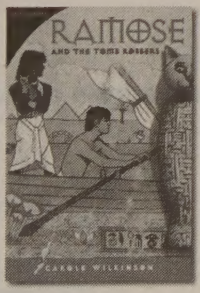

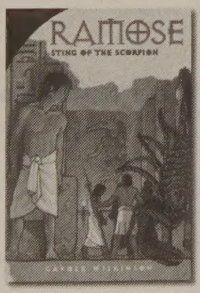

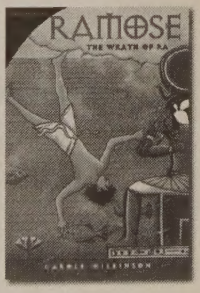

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